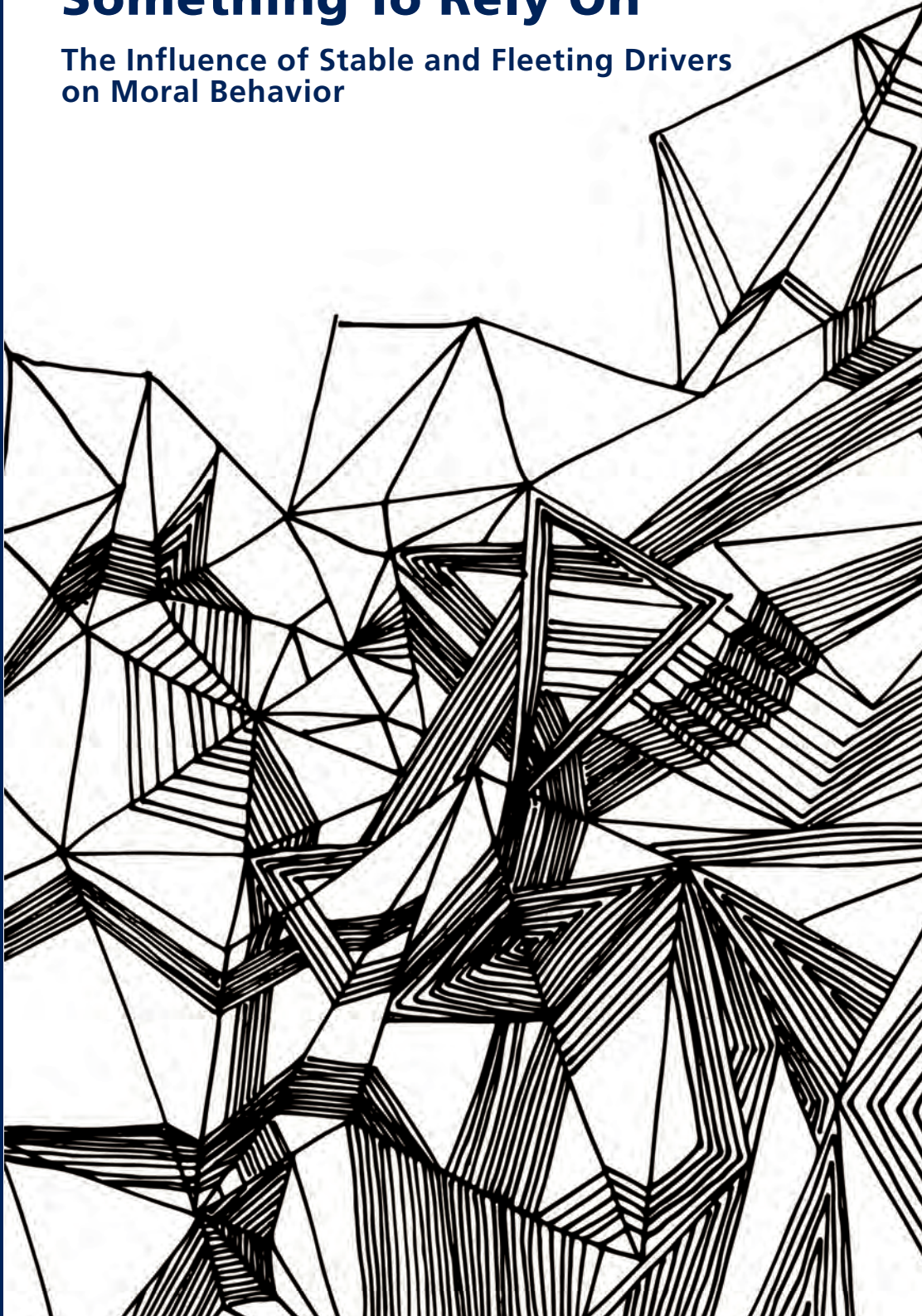


GIJS VAN HOUWELINGEN

Something To Rely On

The Influence of Stable and Fleeting Drivers
on Moral Behavior



Something to Rely On:

The influence of stable and fleeting
drivers on moral behavior

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The influence of stable and fleeting drivers on moral behavior

Iets om vanuit te gaan:

De invloed van stabiele en vluchtige drijfveren op moreel gedrag

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In Wirklichkeit gibt es nichts Konservatives als die Wissenschaft. Die Wissenschaft verlegt Eisenbahngleise. Und für die Wissenschaftler ist es wichtig, daß sich ihre Arbeit auf diesen Geleisen bewegt.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Chapter 1. General Introduction

If you are anything like me the following should be familiar to you. You are steadily working towards your long-term goals and commitments. You are, say, getting ready to work out to lose weight, rushing not to be late at work (again), getting ready to go to bed early so as to be productive tomorrow and so on. However, the next moment but one thing changes and you catch yourself doing the exact opposite of what you were planning to do. That bag of chips looked especially tempting today, you absolutely needed to see that latest new status update on Facebook (which for some reason is always about dogs) or perhaps a friend called to go out and get a drink.

These are all examples of relatively inconsequential predicaments we all face on a daily - or perhaps even a more than daily - basis. But also more important dilemmas we face in our lives share the feature of involving a conflict between relatively short-lived influences pulling us, as it were, in one direction and relatively long-lived goals or commitments pushing us into another. Moral dilemmas form a case in point: Should you be faithful to your long-term partner or sleep with this attractive stranger who is only in town for a few days? Should you decide to dump toxic waste destroying the environment whilst restoring profitability in the short term? Short-lived influences I call *fleeting drivers* in this dissertation: a craving for chips, a curiosity for what is new on the social networks, short-term profit and so on. Longer-lived influences I call *stable drivers*: a commitment to lose weight, to be on time or to be productive tomorrow.

In short, both on the mundane level as well as on the moral level our lives are filled with conflicts between fleeting and stable drivers. In the most general of terms my dissertation is devoted to understanding how people manage such conflicts. This is not a new question. In fact, these kinds of conflicts have been studied by psychologists for several decades now (Baumeister, & Exline,

1999). The picture that is painted of mankind by this research is typically not very flattering: the psychological science seems to have spared no expense to uncover the myriad of ways that we may be distracted from pursuing the long-term goals we set for ourselves, the things we committed ourselves to and other stable drivers motivating behavior (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008).

This apparent inability to make due on long-term goals is especially problematic from a moral point of view. Morality is often taken to involve at the very least the ability to overcome momentary self-interest combined with the ability to act on principles and rules whose validity goes beyond our immediate circumstances and situation (Haidt, & Kesebir, 2010). On this view, morality, thus, is in the terms introduced above associated with the ability to act upon stable drivers and to ignore fleeting distractions. Staying faithful to a long-term partner, for instance, or taking care of things that are important on the long run (such as the environment). If it is indeed the case that we are virtually always swayed by overwhelming situational forces, true moral behavior in this sense may actually turn out to be implausible (if not impossible). However, notwithstanding the great amount of research that has shown this sensitivity of human behavior to fleeting cues, in this thesis I paint a more nuanced picture. I do so in two different ways.

First, I point out that even though people act on fleeting drivers from time to time, they also often do not. At least as often as I indulge in unhealthy snacks or drinks, I do work out, I do *not* cheat on my partner, I have a good night sleep and so on. Much extant research has focused on explaining why people may *fail* to uphold commitments and pull through on long-term goals (i.e. fail to act in accordance to stable drivers). In this dissertation, in contrast, I develop and test a model that is able to explain *both* why people may sometimes act in accordance to fleeting drivers *and* sometimes in accordance to stable drivers. Secondly, I point out that there are many different types

of situations in which fleeting and stable drivers are at odds with each other. Situations in which acting in line with a stable driver (losing weight, getting to work on time, having a good night sleep) is clearly the more socially and/or morally desirable thing to do represent actually only a subset of these. Indeed, it is easy to come up with examples of situations in which acting in accordance to fleeting drivers leads one in a different direction than acting in accordance to stable ones, even though neither direction can strictly speaking be said to be preferable a priori. In other words: rather than learning how to act solely on stable drivers, we need to find a balance between the stable and the fleeting in our lives. Solely acting on situational drivers may likely often stand in the way of fulfilling long-term goals. Not paying attention to the affordances of the situation, in contrast, may lead us to miss many valuable opportunities (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

More formally: in this dissertation I analyze situations in which fleeting drivers are at odds with stable ones. I take a special interest in the moral domain, broadly defined. An example of the kinds of situations I focus on, for instance, is the situation in which honoring our long-term stable relational commitments may lead us to cooperate with another person, whereas short-term self-interest may motivate us to exploit an interaction partner (Chapter 2). A further illustration is the situation in which there is an option to take guidance on how and who to punish either from stable (moral) principles and rules or from fleeting situational cues (Chapter 4).

In general, I posit that there are hardly any situations in which fleeting and stable drivers do not, simultaneously, exert influence. Indeed, the very reason why it is so hard to say ‘no’ to a bag of chips when we are on a diet or to refuse the offer of a drink in town when we want to go to sleep, is because we are simultaneously influenced in two (or more) different ways. Stable drivers push us to display one type of behavior (exercise, stay at home), whereas fleeting drivers try to get us to do something else (eat a bag of chips, go out). Hence, what is crucial is not only to understand what

kinds of (fleeting and stable) drivers exert influence in a given situation. We should also strive to understand what *determines* the influence of both stable and fleeting drivers relative to each other. In this dissertation I present a potentially surprising answer to this latter question: one mechanism that determines the relative influence of stable and fleeting drivers is cognitive abstraction or ‘construal level’ (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). Abstraction, as opposed to concreteness, allows one to transcend the ‘here and the now’ (Liberman, & Trope, 2007). It is, in other words, a metaphorical ‘step back’ which quells the ‘call’ of fleeting drivers whilst amplifying the influence of stable ones (Fujita, 2012). Because of this *facilitating* effect abstraction is related with a relatively stronger influence of stable drivers upon our behaviors, whereas concreteness is associated with an increased influence of fleeting drivers.

The facilitating effect of abstraction is, strictly speaking, an *amoral* (i.e. neither moral or immoral) effect. I do suggest, however, – for reasons already alluded to above – that it holds specific importance for the psychology of morality. In this chapter I will first briefly discuss why I believe this to be the case. Thereafter I will describe my framework in more detail and explain my empirical strategies (in sections 1.3 and 1.4). I also devote some space to discuss the normative implications of my argument in section 1.5.

1.1 What we know and what we don’t know

The history of thinking about the role of abstraction in moral psychology is somewhat complex. I am definitely not the first to propose that cognitive abstraction plays an important role in shaping moral evaluations and behaviors (see e.g. Ågerström, & Björklund, 2009a;b; Eyal Liberman, & Trope, 2008 for some recent examples). In fact, many traditions within moral philosophy presume that morality crucially depends on the ability to apply abstract axioms to specific situations. The most well-known of these so-called axiomatic traditions are deontology (Kant, 1785/2011; McNaughton

& Rawling, 1998: the categorical imperative) and consequentialism (Etzioni, 1988; Wilcox, 1987: the utilitarian calculus). Largely as a reflection thereof, the earliest moral psychologists focused on moral reasoning abilities and how these relate to both moral judgments and moral behaviors (Kohlberg, 1973; Piaget, 1932/1965). These studies were often based on the presumption that the ability to reason abstractly is the highest form of moral decision-making (Kuhn, Langer, Kohlberg, & Haan, 1977).

Modern-day moral psychology arguably started out as a reaction to these moral reasoning models (Monin, Pizarro, & Beer, 2007). One of the most celebrated findings of this new kind of moral psychology, for instance, was the fact that people can be ‘morally dumbfounded’ (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Haidt, & Hersh, 2001). Moral dumbfounding is the phenomenon that people can quite quickly be made to run out of reasons to justify condemning so-called harmless transgressions – like consensual sibling incest or consuming meat from one’s dead dog – and yet still regard the behavior as immoral (e.g. “I don’t know why, but I know it is wrong”; Haidt, et al., 1993). This phenomenon is often taken as evidence for Haidt’s (2001) social intuitionist model (or similar models, e.g. Pizarro, & Bloom, 2003) which posits that most moral judgments are in fact driven by socially induced intuitions and/or affective reactions. According to this model abstract reasoning is predominantly used as a way to rationalize these affectively derived judgments post-hoc (Haidt, 2002).

Cognitive abstraction was put into a somewhat unfavorable light over the last few decades precisely because of this development. Abstraction was, or is, typically considered to be nothing but an afterthought, with little (if any) causal role to play in moral judgment and behavior (see e.g. Greene & Haidt, 2002). Moral evaluations have come to be seen as largely, if not wholly, caused by incidental – and thus fleeting – affective reactions (Haidt, 2007; 2008). A rather unfortunate

consequence of this is that the moral person tends to be described as basically a victim of his or her intuitions, emotions, brain functions and/or the situation he or she is placed in. People are presumed to be unable to understand what really drives his or her behavior or judgments and, therefore, also unable to change it (Abend, 2012 and Lavazze & De Caro, 2010).

Several scholars, however, have argued that this picture is rather one-sided (see e.g. Abend, 2010; Frimer, & Walker, 2008; Salzman, & Kasachkoff, 2004). Their arguments typically suggest that even though moral judgments and behaviors are likely to be driven by affective and intuitional drivers as least as much as by deliberation, this, in itself, does not imply that the moral actor is of necessity always a helpless object of fleeting, situational forces (Monin, et al., 2007). Intuitions and affective reactions are just two types of drivers of human (moral) behaviors among many. It seems unlikely that behavior in the moral domain would be so substantially different from behaviors in other domains so as to be immune to the influence of other types of motivations (e.g. norms, rules and many others). In my terms, in sum, over the last few decades moral psychology has mainly focused on uncovering the fleeting drivers of moral evaluation and behavior. However, fleeting drivers often coexist with stable ones. Moral behavior should thus often be the result of the interplay between both types of drivers.

By recruiting the help of construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) I suggest we are able to develop a new and more nuanced understanding of the role of abstraction for the psychology of morality. This understanding implies that we should not necessarily relate abstraction to deliberation. We should, rather, see it as a facilitator or inhibitor of certain influences (that is: stable and fleeting drivers of behavior, respectively) on behavior (Burgoon et al., 2013). Within construal level theory abstraction is seen as a mental movement away from the immediate situation that allows one to look beyond the horizon of the current situation, so to speak (Trope, & Liberman, 2003). It

is because of this effect that abstraction quells the influence of fleeting drivers *and*, simultaneously, facilitates the expression of stable drivers in judgment and behavior (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

More formally, abstraction is described precisely as a shift in focus from the concrete, peripheral and detailed elements (i.e. fleeting) in a given situation to more abstract, central and generalized elements, which are by definition more stable across situations. The precise nature (e.g. affective, cognitive, social) of both the stable as well as of fleeting drivers that exert influence, then, depends on the type of behavior we are studying. A dispositional emotion (e.g. trait happiness or sadness), for instance, can just as well be seen as a stable driver as can a moral principle. After all, both these influences stably exert influence across situations (Ledgerwood, & Callahan, 2012). Similarly, an incidental emotion (such as a flash of disgust) or a very specific rule (e.g. a rule of a game) are both examples of fleeting influences since they only very temporarily exert influence on behavior.

Construal level theory provides a way to think about the role of abstraction within the moral domain without needing to posit, in light of recent evidence, the unrealistic claim that abstract deliberation plays a strong causal role in determining moral behavior. However, this new way of thinking has up to now gone largely underexplored, even within the construal level literature (Eyal, et al., 2008; Gong & Medin, 2012; Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010). My dissertation can be seen as an attempt to start this exploration.

1.2 Construal level theory and morality

Construal level theory is built around the observation that cognitive abstraction is the mechanism that allows for ‘mental travel’ (Trope & Liberman, 2010). That is: it allows us to imagine situations

far away from where we are now (in time, space, from reality, etc Liberman, & Trope, 2007). It is the disengagement from relatively peripheral and detailed information coupled with the focus on more stable and central pieces of information that are both definitionally part of abstraction which allows for this (Burgoon et al., 2013). For example, if I think about going on holiday somewhere far away in a few months' time I have little or no detailed information about the place I am going to. I am, for instance, unlikely to be sure of things like the kind of weather I will be experiencing and the food I will be consuming. I do, however, usually have some information on the kind of weather that is typical for the area I want to visit or the kind of food that is generally served there. By focusing on these latter more abstract pieces of information (and disregarding the details) I am able to construct for myself a mental image of my holiday despite missing information. This level of representation that includes mostly or only generalized and abstract pieces of information is called *high construal level*. When the holiday comes closer, however, I will usually find out more detailed information about it: where I will stay, specific dishes that are popular and I will have more precise information about the weather I can expect. Hence, to build a mental representation now I can focus on more these detailed pieces of information –*low construal level*.

In formal terms, abstract mental representations of objects, situations or stimuli that contain relatively little information which is likely to be stable across situations are at high construal levels. Low construal levels, in contrast, include relatively much and relatively detailed information. Because of this, objects, stimuli or situations represented at low construal levels are represented in more concrete terms. In accordance with this reasoning, construal level has been shown to be tightly interconnected with all elements of psychological distance (see e.g. Trope, & Liberman, 2010 for a recent review of this literature): high construal level is generally associated with representation of stimuli or events at larger distances (than low construal level; Henderson, Wakslak, Fujita, & Rohrbach, 2011). Additionally, it has been shown that high construal level leads to a categorization

of elements in broader, more inclusive, categories than low construal level (Atler, & Oppenheimer, 2008).

High construal levels tend to involve a focus on the more stable and more generalized types of information. Because of this, detailed and peripheral cues have less of an influence on decision-making and behavior when compared to low construal level. In simple terms: people pay less attention to details under high construal level than under low construal level and details thus have less influence on them (Burgoon et al., 2013). Fleeting drivers are by definition low level elements of a situation, whereas the kind of cues that motivate decision-making and behavior under high construal level are by definition stable cues. Indeed, we might even say that it is precisely these detailed, fleeting, elements that differentiate the current situation from another one. Hence, low construal level is a more situationally sensitive type of cognition. This means that it allows for a stronger influence of fleeting drivers (than high construal level). High construal level, in contrast, is a less situationally sensitive type of cognition, allowing for stable drivers to take hold. Returning to the metaphor I used above, we might say that by taking the step back (i.e. moving towards a high level of construal) it becomes easier to ignore fleeting details and focus on stable features of our lives. Taking a step forward (i.e. moving towards a low level of construal), then, allows one to focus on fleeting details, but also may cause the 'bigger picture' to move out of sight (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

In sum, low construal level facilitates the expression of fleeting drivers in behavior and decision-making at the expense of stable ones. High construal level has the opposite effect. In a direct test of this latter proposition, Soman (1998) found that the relative weight of a short-term cost (travel time) decreased relative to the influence of a long-term benefit (a monetary pay-off) for the decision whether or not to engage in a certain action (shopping a certain store) when people were

brought into a high (vs. low) construal level mindset. In a similar vein, though somewhat less directly, Trope and Liberman (1998) showed that activity enactment was more likely to be influenced by concerns relating to what is seen as feasible in the immediate situation under low (vs. high) construal level. For high construal level long-term desirability concerns were of more importance. What is feasible tends to be dependent upon the affordances of the current situation (i.e. on fleeting elements). What we see as desirable tends to be relatively cross-situationally stable. Trope and Liberman (1998) in their study focused on the goal to obtain a good education, for instance. Further, Ledgerwood and Callahan (2012) showed that high construal level tends to be associated with more social conformity than low construal level. Social norms are relatively stable and thus have a stronger influence on behavior under high, rather than low, level construal. Beyond these few examples, construal level has been shown to influence a host of relatively disparate phenomena. These phenomena include, for instance, representation or categorization (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002) as well as evaluation (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010), judgment and decision-making (Liberman, & Trope, 1998) and self-regulation (Fujita & Carnevale, 2012; Fujita & Han, 2009 – see below).

In sum, construal level is the cognitive phenomenon that regulates the situational sensitivity of evaluation and behavior. Under low construal level people are generally easily swayed by situational, fleeting, influences. Under high construal level, in contrast, fleeting drivers have little or no influence on judgment and behavior and stable drivers even more so (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

In this chapter I started out with pointing out that many conflicts in our lives – moral as well as more mundane ones – are conflicts between stable and fleeting influences on behavior. A fleeting driver (e.g. a sudden attraction to a handsome stranger) influences one to act in a certain way. A

stable driver (e.g. a commitment to a lifelong partner) pushes one into another direction, as it were. Construal level theory is therefore highly relevant to understand and study precisely these kinds of situations. Unfortunately, this is not what up to now has been done in the construal level literature. Like the field of (moral) psychology more generally, studies on the role of construal level within morality (Agerström & Björklund, 2010a;b; Eyal et al., 2008) have typically focused on moral evaluations of certain behaviors of other people. These studies have shown, by and large, that high construal level is associated with stronger moral approbation of contentious behaviors (than low construal level). High construal was also shown to be associated with higher praise for praiseworthy behaviors. It should be noted that these results have proven hard to replicate, however (Gong & Medin, 2012). Eyal and colleagues (2008) explain this effect by arguing that high construal level makes relatively abstract concepts, such as moral norms, more accessible (when compared to low construal level). I do not dispute this argument. However, this effect does say little, if anything, about what motivates our own moral behaviors and how construal level affects the relative influence of various drivers – which is the thing I am primarily interested here.

A few other construal level studies do focus on the motivational bases of moral behaviors. These studies are, however, on the whole only marginally more informative as regards my research question. Conway and Peetz (2012), for example, showed that under high construal level recalling previous moral behavior motivates behavior *consistent* with those memories. Low construal level was associated with *inconsistent* behavior. These results indicate that construal level does regulate the motivational influence of certain drivers of behavior. However, Conway and Peetz (2012) only studied one driver (moral self-perceptions), the stability or fleetingness of which is not clear. Additionally, they (i.e. Conway and Peetz) studied thoroughly different motivational processes (moral licensing and compensation) than I do here.

Studies by Eyal and colleagues (2009) and Hunt and colleagues (2010) are closer to my research question. Both of these studies show a greater correlation between values (by definition stable drivers of behavior and decision-making, Schwartz, 1994), on the one hand, and intentions (Eyal, et al., 2009) as well as evaluations (Hunt et al., 2010), on the other, for high construal level when compared to low construal level. Hunt and colleagues (2010) additionally show that the effect of temporary self-interest (a fleeting driver) on moral evaluations is greater for low construal level, when compared to high construal level. Both studies, however, study effects on attitudes (intentions and evaluations) and not on behavior, like I do in my studies. Additionally, both studies did not investigate the effects of other types of stable influences beyond that of personal values (see also Torelli, & Kaikati, 2009). Nonetheless, taken together, these studies are indicative of a regulative role of construal level with regard to the stable or fleeting motivational bases of moral behavior.

In sum, much work remains to be done to fully explore the role of construal level in moral behavior. With this dissertation I want to extend construal level thinking within the moral domain in two ways. First, I use construal level theory to build a framework that can be used to explain the motivational effects of *both* fleeting *and* stable drivers on decision-making and behavior. Basing myself on construal level research allows me to study both types of drivers within one research design. Secondly, I go beyond the traditional focus of construal level research on attitudes. I will describe my framework in more detail below.

1.3 The stable, the fleeting and moral behavior: a framework

Right now I am both motivated by the (long-term) drive to finish my dissertation and get on with my life as well as my (short-term) need to surf the Internet and look at cute pictures of pugs. This is the simple premise of my argument: in many situations and contexts we are simultaneously influenced by fleeting and stable drivers motivating different kinds of behaviors. It is therefore not

only important to understand what kinds of (fleeting and stable) drivers are present in a given situation. It is also important to understand what determines the influence of stable and fleeting drivers relative to each other. Construal level determines precisely the influence of both fleeting as well as stable drivers. High construal level facilitates the expression of stable drivers in behavior and decision-making and quells the influence of fleeting ones. Low construal level has the opposite effect. In the moral domain relevant stable drivers are likely to be moral principles, norms and rules. Hence, high construal level *facilitates* the expression of moral principles in decision-making and behavior and *impedes* the expression of fleeting drivers, such as short-term self-interest. Low construal level has the opposite effect: it *facilitates* the expression of fleeting drivers and *impedes* the expression of moral rules. This, in a nutshell, is the hypothesis I have tested in various ways in the studies reported in this thesis.

Above, I have discussed some findings from moral psychological research lending some credence to this proposition (i.e. the studies by Hunt et al., 2010, Eyal et al., 2009 and others). I have also shown, however, that the support offered by these research efforts is marginal at best. Research from different fields may therefore be more informative here. Examples include the studies by Ledgerwood and Callahan (2010), who showed that high construal level is associated with social conformity. Another example is the study by Soman (1998) who showed that the influence of fleeting concerns relative to stable ones decreases when people are brought into a high construal level mindset (when compared to a low construal level mindset). Both these studies I have discussed in some detail already. Another example can be found in the studies reported by Ledgerwood, Trope and Chaiken (2010), who showed that low construal level makes attitudes more susceptible to be influenced by incidental (i.e. fleeting) third party opinions (when compared to high construal level).

However, especially interesting for our present purposes is the stream of literature that has looked at the self-regulatory effects of construal level (see Fujita, 2011 for an overview and a statement). Many self-regulatory failures (e.g. a dieter indulging in unhealthy snacks) come forth from giving in to (short-lived) temptations despite of longer-term goals not to do so. Redefining the situation in more abstract (high level) terms therefore helps people to exert self-control. After all, high construal level quells the pull of fleeting influences such as unhealthy snacks and facilitates the push of stable drivers, such as a commitment to weight loss (Fujita, 2011). In line with this argument, Fujita and Roberts (2010) showed that dieters under high construal level were more likely to choose strategies that did not expose them to temptations (i.e. bracketed choice) versus strategies that did (i.e. individual choice). Bracketed choice allows for ‘future lock-in’, that is: future choices are already pre-determined at an earlier point of time. Individual choice implies a self-control conflict at each moment of choosing. Hence, opting for bracketing choice over individual choice as a strategy implies that self-control conflicts are anticipated and dealt with *ante hoc*. Fujita and Han (2009), moreover, showed that people under high construal level were more likely to exert effort on a physically taxing but eventually rewarding task (i.e. holding a handgrip) when compared to low construal level. On the whole, this research shows that high construal level is associated with behavior that is in line with long-term commitments (i.e. stable drivers), low construal level is associated with a greater sensitivity to situational drivers.

Based on the results described above, one further effect we should be able to observe is that high construal level is associated with cross-situational *consistency* in decision-making and behavior. Low construal level is associated with cross-situational *inconsistency*. Stable drivers, such as moral principles, are by their very definition cross-situationally constant. Moral principles, long-term goals, commitments to a cause and so on are examples of things that are unlikely to change when we move from situation to situation. Hence, acting in line with these kinds of drivers, as is likely under high

construal level, leads to the display of similar behavior in comparable situations. Fleeting drivers, in contrast, are by definition likely to change from situation to situation. An incidental emotion is likely to be short-lived, a temptation quickly overcome. Hence, acting on fleeting drivers, as is likely under low construal level, leads to inconsistent behavior in comparable situations. This effect, I argue, we should be able to observe in a variety of contexts. Any context, for that matter, where fleeting drivers invite us to act in a certain way and stable ones push us into another direction. My empirical strategy is therefore partly based on proving consistency or inconsistency in behavior across contexts as a way to observe the influence of both fleeting and stable drivers.

1.4 Empirical strategy

Studying the psychology of morality empirically presents a peculiar kind of challenge (Abend, 2012). One of the main problems here is that we have yet to find a common understanding – or even just a working definition – of what morality actually *is* (Haidt, 2008). The same is true as regards the delineation of the domain of phenomena that are properly moral. However, without a definition of what is arguably the main explanandum, it is hard to come up with a suitable empirical strategy to study it. Throughout this dissertation I have therefore chosen to base myself on Haidt and Kesebir's (2010) approach – even if it is only by default: Haidt and Kesebir's (2010) is one of the very few approaches I have seen that does not seem to favor one kind of morality (e.g. utilism or deontology) over another. They (i.e. Haidt and Kesebir) define morality as that “sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible” (p. 800; see Rai, & Fiske, 2011 for a comparable approach).

In line with this, I have chosen to study behaviors that are clearly involved in ‘making social life possible’. These include behaviors such as cooperation (Chapter 2), punishment and discipline (Chapters 3 and 4) as well as the restoration of trust (Chapter 5). This approach stands in some contrast to the phenomena studied by moral psychologists over the last few decades. Overwhelmingly, moral psychologists have focused on studying moral *evaluations*, rather than behaviors (Abend, 2012). These evaluations typically concern relatively contrived scenarios designed so as to evoke a flash of emotion, such as disgust or compassion (see Haidt, & Björklund, 2008 for example). Alternatively, some scenarios are likely to pit two important moral intuitions against each other (e.g. Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). Such scenarios are definitely useful to study for instance the role of incidental emotion in moral judgment or how moral decisions are based on intuitions. However, they tell us little about the kind of things that make social life possible (Abend, 2008; Lavazze, & De Caro, 2010). The moral domain is arguably much broader and more varied than this research into moral judgments sometimes makes it seem.

In this dissertation I have therefore taken a different approach. I did so in two ways. First, I studied moral *behaviors*, rather than evaluations. Secondly, I do not only study the influence of one manipulated driver, such as the presence or absence of incidental disgust (e.g. Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan, 2008) on moral evaluations. Rather, I explicitly acknowledge that moral behavior is virtually always the result of the influence of multiple drivers. Some of these drivers are clearly ‘moral’ (moral rules, principles, norms or values etc.), others less so (e.g. practical concerns, short-term self-interest etc.). Similarly, some drivers are relatively cross-situationally stable, some relatively fleeting. I therefore focus attention not so much on understanding how one driver may motivate moral judgment and behavior in isolation. Rather, I try to address the question what determines the relative influence of different *types* of drivers. Arguably, this provides a more realistic picture of how moral behavior comes about (Abend, 2012). I focus on specific social phenomena as outcome

measures, such as cooperation, trust and punishment. I then proceed by identifying the fleeting and stable drivers that relate to these behaviors. Thereafter, I test to what extent low construal level facilitates the effect of fleeting drivers and suppresses the effect of stable ones as well as to what extent high construal level has the opposite effect.

1.4.1 Overview of the dissertation

Specifically, in my first empirical chapter, Chapter 2, I study the situation in which one *feels trusted* by an interaction partner. In contrast to the effects of trust, we know little, if anything, yet about the effects of feeling trusted (Lau & Lam, 2008). Extant research generally has focused on studying cooperative responses to feeling trusted. This research seems generally to have assumed that the feeling trusted to cooperation link is the main explanandum here (e.g. Lester & Brower, 2003; Lau, Lam, & Wen, 2014; Malhotra, 2004). I offer a different perspective in Chapter 2. I argue that feeling trusted may also, somewhat ironically, invoke non-cooperative behavior. The reason for this is that the situation in which one feels trusted may be seen – or construed – in two different ways. On the one hand one may construe the situation in terms of an obligation to return the favor. That is: one may be inclined to display trustworthy behavior out of sense of obligation towards the interaction partner. On the other hand, one may perceive the situation as one that offers extra opportunities for self-interested behavior. The reason for this is that trust is generally defined by a willingness to be vulnerable to another's actions coupled with unwillingness to monitor that other's actions (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Given this vulnerability and unwillingness to monitor, the trusted party arguably has more freedom to behave in self-interested ways.

Construing the feeling trusted situation in terms of obligations is more likely under high construal level. This latter thought squares well with previous research, which has generally

explained cooperative responses to feeling trusted either as motivated by a concern for reciprocity (e.g. Malhotra, 2004) or reputation (e.g. Boksem et al., 2013; DeBruine, 2002) – both long-term relational goals. High construal level facilitates the expression of such goals in behavior. Construal of the feeling trusted situation in terms of increased freedom to display self-interested behavior is more likely under low construal level. Low construal level makes people motivated to exploit the affordances of the current situation. In one controlled web-based experiment using a trust game design (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995) and one organizational field study I do indeed show that the extent in which a trustee feels trusted affects cooperation with the trustor, but only under high construal level.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the question why people may or may not display a form of behavior that is considered desirable under many circumstances (i.e. cooperation). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are all concerned, in different ways, with responses to another person's *undesirable* behaviors. In both Chapters 3 and 4 I focus on the use of punishment in response to transgressions of moral norms. First, in chapter 3 I apply my general framework to punitive decision-making. In particular, I note that the literature shows that punishment can be driven by relatively stable drivers, such as personal punishment philosophies (e.g. Cushman, 2006; Darley & Pittman, 2001). However, it has also been shown that punishment may be driven by relatively fleeting concerns, such a perpetrator status (Fragale, Rose, Xu & Meredith, 2009) or even the time of day (Danziger, et al., 2011a;b). However, no previous research effort has ever considered both fleeting and stable drivers of punishment in unison, at least for as far as I know. This all the more regretful, since the importance of studying the influence of both stable drivers as well as fleeting drivers in the punishment process has been widely acknowledged in fields such as the philosophy of punishment (Cotton, 2000; Gromet & Darley, 2006) and criminology (Kozinski, 1993). Additionally, the question regarding the fleetingness of dominant punishment-motives is also important from a social perspective. It is

socially generally expected from punishing agents (e.g. judges) to balance the need for consistent application of rules with the need for flexibility when confronted with exceptional cases (Simon, 1998). This is thus an issue for which psychological insights may very well be crucial, yet very little psychological research has as of yet been done on this question.

In Chapter 3 I show that both fleeting factors pertaining to the perpetrator side of the dyad (i.e. perpetrator social status, Study 3.1) and fleeting factors pertaining to the punisher side (i.e. punisher self-interest, Study 3.2) may affect punishment. Neither perpetrator status nor punisher self-interest should, strictly speaking, have influence on the applicability of a norm. Hence, when decision-making is mainly driven by a focus on moral norms, the influence of both should be quelled. Yet, both perpetrator status (Fragale et al., 2009) and punisher self-interest (Hoogervorst, De Cremer, & Van Dijke, 2010) have been found to influence punitive decision-making. In two experimental studies I showed that the influence of these two important fleeting drivers of punishment (i.e. punisher self-interest and perpetrator status) determine punitive decision-making under low construal level, but not under high construal level. In a third study (a multi-source field study), I further show that the effect of construal level on the cross-situational consistency of punishment is explained by high construal level's facilitation of rule-based moral thinking.

Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I focus on an ironic consequence of this effect. Acting on fleeting drivers may stand in the way of reaching stable, long-term, aims. For instance, I may very well be committed to the goal to finish my dissertation in time, but if I am in a low construal level mindset and fleeting drivers tend to 'loom larger' for me. In that case, I may very well be unable to withstand to temptation to procrastinate. However, the reverse is also true: my commitment to my longer-term aims may stand in the way of fulfilling my momentary desires (i.e. procrastination). For

low construal level actors stable drivers may thus sometimes feel like frustrating impediments standing in the way of making the most out of a situation.

In the context of punishment this means that low construal level punishers (I focus on organizational leaders in Chapter 4) can fail to enact disciplinary measures even when the situation calls for it, as they are unwilling to enforce moral rules. The reason for this is that moral rules appear to them as frustrating impediments and the need to enforce them as an unwelcome distraction. In simple terms, low construal level's focus on the current situation makes it harder to see 'the point' of moral rules enactment. I use the case of unintentional versus intentional transgressions to explore this. Many rules can be broken both unintentionally and intentionally. Whereas for intentional transgressions punishment is typically considered warranted and justified, unintentional transgressions are seen as less worthy of punishment (Fragale, et al., 2009). In two experimental studies and one web-based study I show consistently that low construal level leaders are actually *less* likely to enact disciplinary measures in response to intentional follower transgressions than in response to unintentional transgressions. The reverse is true for high construal level leaders: these are *more* likely to use discipline when confronted with an intentional transgression when compared to an unintentional transgression. A worrying implication of all this is that low construal level leaders leave unethical follower behavior undisciplined, thereby potentially unwittingly allowing it to spread throughout the organization.

Lastly, in chapter 5 I look at another form of behavior that may be displayed in response to normative transgressions: granting forgiveness (in this chapter I use the term 'trust maintenance'). Specifically, I look at trust restoration as a result of an apology offered by the perpetrator (or 'trustee') after a transgression as a function of victim (or 'trustor') construal level. Apologies are one of the most important instruments at disposal of the trustee to maintain trust after a transgression,

and have received much research attention recently (see Tomlinson, & Mayer, 2009; Kim, Ferrin, & Cooper, 2009 for recent overviews). However, earlier research has generally focused on studying only the effect of attributions in apologies on the restoration of trust. Research has shown, for instance, that for moral transgressions attributions to causes external to the trustee (“someone else did it”) are more effective than to causes internal to the trustee (“I did it”). Attributions, however, are not the only element of an apology. The effectiveness of an apology is therefore unlikely to be fully dependent upon them.

One other aspect of an apology is that it is a symbolic gesture aimed at making amends (Desmet, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2011; Skarlicki, Folger, & Gee, 2004). While attributions may vary from apology to apology this symbolic element is necessarily a part of any (sincere) apology (Lazare, 2000). I thus suggest that attributions can be seen as fleeting (and thus low level) elements of apologies, while the symbolic element of an apology can be seen as the stable (and thus high level) element. Hence, because of this, attributions should be more likely to determine the success of an apology in terms of restoring and maintaining a trust relationship when a trustor is in a low construal level mindset (compared to a high construal level mindset). I show this to be the case in three different experimental studies, in which I vary attributions used in apologies along three dimensions identified by Weiner (1986; i.e. locus of causality, controllability and stability).

After these empirical chapters I integrate these results and my arguments in chapter 6. In this chapter I also discuss theoretical, practical and policy implications of my findings. It should be noted that chapters 2 to 5 are chapters that have been submitted for publication. These chapters can thus very well be read separately. Each chapter on its own provides an illustration of my overarching theoretical model. Yet, reading these chapters together with this first chapter as well as the last

chapter may provide deeper insight in the precise way that moral behaviors are influenced by fleeting and stable drivers and the role of construal level in those processes.

1.5 One last note: Why this research is important

Morality is about what we (think we) *should* do (Rai, & Fiske, 2011). In this dissertation, as is customary within moral psychology, I try to stay as neutral as possible to the moral value of acting upon either fleeting or stable drivers. In light of this, I believe it to be important to address briefly the normative value of acting on stable or fleeting drivers. In some conversations I have had about my dissertation topic I noticed that people tend to assume that acting upon stable drivers is always to be preferred over being influenced by fleeting ones. I do not think this is the case. I would suggest that it is rather desirable to achieve some kind of balance between the two. Specifically, I argue that we should make sure that acting upon fleeting drivers does not stand in the way of achieving long-term goals or honoring commitments. At the same time, however, we should allow ourselves to be flexible enough to make use of a situations affordance or to address a situation's needs. This typically requires lower levels of construal.

This is not to say that acting in accordance to stable drivers is not important. If we allow ourselves to be swayed by fleeting drivers at every moment we will be unlikely to ever get anything done. Not to mention the fact that we might be likely to be leading a very unhealthy lifestyle in that case. Most importantly, perhaps: building deep and meaningful social relations requires honoring ones commitment to another. Many important things in life simply require dedication and commitment. But that is not all. Commitment and dedication, however important, are unlikely to be a panacea for success in life. Commitments may escalate (Staw, 1981); we may be overly dedicated to causes that ultimately lead us to dead end streets. What is more, 'seizing the moment', I would

suggest, ultimately requires recognizing opportunities when they present themselves. Such opportunities are most likely situation-dependent and (thus) fleeting.

In all, thus, I believe there is a pretty good case to be made that what matters is *simultaneously* not to rely too much stable drivers (as that makes one stale and inflexible), whilst also avoiding acting upon every and all fleeting drivers that present themselves, so as to not to become unreliable and an easy target for manipulation. Despite the long history of research focusing (especially) on how people are affected by fleeting elements in their immediate surroundings, psychological literature is remarkably silent with regard to the question how to achieve this. Becoming aware of how cognitive mechanisms such as construal level affect the situational dependency of our behavior and decision-making may be a first step towards this goal. The research presented here was at least in part done with that aim in mind.

Chapter 2. The Long and Short of Feeling Trusted: Construal Level Affects the Effect of Feeling Trusted on Cooperation

It is crucial for the proper functioning of organizations that members strive for optimal long-term outcomes for all parties involved (i.e. display cooperative behavior), rather than indulging their short-term self-interest (Allen, 1997; Axelrod, 2006; De Cremer & Tyler, 2007; Lopes, 1994). Over the last five decades, research has revealed strong evidence that trust is almost a *sine qua non* for individuals to behave cooperatively (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The vast majority of research in this area has zoomed in on the amount of trust one person (the ‘trustor’) has in his/her interaction partner (‘the trustee’) as impacting the trustor’s behaviors (see Balliet & Van Lange, 2013; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007 for overviews). The main thrust of this literature is that since trust implies that the trustee is seen as dependable and honest, cooperating with that other carries less risk for the trustor, leading to increased cooperation (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Both in the applied and organizational literatures (e.g. Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009) as well as in the social psychological literature (e.g. Malhotra, 2004; Pillutla, et al., 2003) it has been argued, however, that trust in the interaction partner may actually not be enough to achieve optimal cooperation. This emerging literature shows that it is crucial to also include the perspective of the trustee and, thus, to focus on his or her responses to *feeling* trusted as an antecedent of cooperation (Lau, Liu, & Fu, 2007; Lau & Lam, 2008).

Unfortunately, compared to our understanding of the role of trust in others in promoting cooperation (McEvily & Tortoriello, 2011), research to date has been largely silent when it comes to our understanding of the processes that explain *why* feeling trusted would promote cooperation (Lau & Lam, 2008). This gap in the literature not only limits our knowledge of the processes involved (i.e. the “why” question), but also limits our understanding of the conditions under which this effect is

likely to occur (i.e. the “when” question). The present research addresses these “why” and “when” questions.

Feeling trusted presents the trustee with two motives for action that might push him or her in opposite directions (i.e. a dilemma). On the one hand, cooperation has long term benefits: the trusting relation with the trustor is maintained and further established (Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Pillutla, et al., 2003) and one gains a reputation for trustworthiness (Boksem et al., 2013; DeBruine, 2002). Yet, on the other hand, feeling trusted also implies that the trustor is seen as vulnerable to exploitation (since trusting implies making oneself vulnerable to the actions of another) and unwilling to monitor the actions of the trustee (Rousseau, et al., 1998). Thus, when one feels trusted, two strategies are available to the trustee: either *cooperation*, with an eye to potential long-term benefits of maintaining a trusting relationship with the trustor, or *non-cooperation* so as to profit (in the short-term) from the trustor’s vulnerability and unwillingness to monitor. We suggest that the strategy that is adopted by the trustee depends on whether the long-term benefits of cooperation loom larger than the short-term benefits of non-cooperation (Lind, 2001; Balliet & Van Lange, 2013).

To test this argument we build on construal level theory (Liberian, & Trope, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Construal level is the cognitive mechanism that regulates the cognitive dependency of cognition on the immediate situation (Trope & Liberman, 2003): low (concrete) level construal implies a focus on the current situation and thus increases the relative weight of short-term concerns in decision-making. High (abstract) construal level decreases situational sensitivity and therefore increases the weight of long-term concerns (Fujita & Carnevale, 2012). In other words: high construal level allows one to take a metaphorical step back and focus on what is important in the long run rather than focusing only on short term needs and affordances (Fujita, 2011), Hence, given

our argument above, if long versus short term concerns shape the decision to cooperate or not in response to feeling trusted, the cooperative effect of feeling trusted should be facilitated by high construal level whereas it should be impeded by low construal level.

By this, we aim to make two contributions to the literature. First, we offer a plausible and meaningful account of *how*, for *whom* and *under what circumstances* feeling trusted will make people respond with cooperation. Recent studies have provided some initial evidence that the effect of feeling trusted on cooperation goes above and beyond the effect of trusting others (Brower et al., 2009; Salamon & Robinson, 2008). However, there is a shortage in the literature of accounts that explain the nature of this relationship between feeling trusted and cooperation as well as the boundary conditions thereof (Lau, et al., 2013). By building upon construal level theory, we aim to offer precisely such a framework. Second, by applying construal level theory to feeling trusted and cooperation, we extend the predominant focus of research testing this theory from the domain of cognitive and intrapersonal phenomena (Burgoon, et al., 2013) to the interpersonal and organizational domain. At the same time, this extension of construal level theory provides scholars of organizational behavior with a versatile and potentially valuable theoretical framework to understand and study their area.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Feeling trusted

Feeling trusted is the experience that one's interaction partner has faith in one's integrity, abilities and benevolence (Schoorman, et al., 2007) and is therefore willing to make him- or herself vulnerable towards the actions of the other (Rousseau et al., 1995). Even though trust and feeling trusted are two sides of the same trusting relationship, they are essentially independent constructs (Lau & Lam, 2008). In fact, empirical studies show only weak to moderate correlations between the two concepts (Malhotra, 2004; Brower et al., 2008). Both trust and feeling trusted affect cooperation,

but do so through different processes (Lester & Brower, 2003). Theorists have argued that trust in others promotes cooperation because it involves the conviction that one will not be taken advantage of, making that one's investments in the relationship by means of cooperation are likely to pay off (Lind & Tyler, 1988). No such consensus exists, however, about the mechanisms that explain the relation between feeling trusted and cooperation. In fact, we know of only one study that tested such a mechanism: Lau et al. (2014) showed that feeling trusted promotes positive self-evaluations, and, therefore, among other things, leads to increased cooperation. Interesting as these results are, they do not tell us much about the motivational basis of cooperation and non-cooperation in response to feeling trusted.

With regard to this theoretical issue, the applied as well as the more fundamental literatures have often pointed to two specific motives for cooperation as a response to feeling trusted. Applied psychologists have tended to focus (albeit not exclusively) on the motive to reciprocate (i.e. feeling trusted is reciprocated by showing cooperative behavior to the trustor) in order to maintain and further establish the trusting relation with the trustor over the longer term (Fehr, Fischbacher, & Gächter, 2002; Pillutla et al., 2003; Salamon & Robinson, 2004). Social psychologists, in contrast, have predominantly focused on a motive to protect one's reputation (i.e. non-cooperation may impede one's chances to establish beneficial relations with potential other interaction partners included in the social network of the trustor; e.g. Boksem et al., 2006; Castelfranchi, Falcone, & Marzo, 2006) to explain this relation. Note that both these motives (i.e. reciprocity and reputation) are in no way at odds with each other. Rather, both imply that the main reason to cooperate is to be able to reap long-term relational benefits (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994).

In the short term, however, non-cooperation is likely to be the more beneficial choice for the trustee. After all, by signaling trust, the trustor also conveys the message that he or she is quite easily

exploitable and is unlikely to monitor the actions of the trustee. Indeed, this vulnerability to exploitation and unwillingness to monitor are two of the defining features of trust (Rousseau et al., 1998; Schoorman et al., 2007). Furthermore, cooperation is often costly in the short term, as one has to forgo one's immediate self-interest for the greater good (De Cremer, Snyder, & DeWitte, 2001). In other words, when one feels trusted by another, the option *not* to respond cooperatively can be a temptation, given the short-term benefits associated with that option. Hence, a key issue to address is what would make a trustee choose one strategy (cooperation versus non-cooperation) over the other. It is clear that this choice should be determined by the relative weight trustors give to long-term versus short-term benefits: if long-term benefits loom larger than short-term advantages, a cooperative strategy is more likely than non-cooperation. If, on the other hand, short-term benefits loom larger than long-term advantages, a non-cooperative strategy is the more likely choice. In the following sections we will argue that construal level is an important theoretical 'lens' to study these processes.

2.1.2 Construal level and feeling trusted

Construal level theory explains the effects and antecedents of cognitive abstraction (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Cognitive abstraction (or construal level) has been shown to differ dispositionally, but it is also highly dependent upon certain situational factors (Burgoon et al., 2013). First and foremost of these is psychological distance (i.e. temporal, spatial, social distance and distance from reality, or 'hypotheticality'; Trope & Liberman, 2010). In fact, construal level theory was initially developed to explain the cognitive effects of temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2003) and was later extended to address other forms of psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010) as well as some other non-distance-related variables, such as power (Smith & Trope, 2006). Essentially, construal level posits that stimuli may be mentally represented ('construed') according to relatively little, abstract information, which is usually relatively stable over time and distance ('high construal

level”), or according to more fleeting and peripheral information (‘low construal level’; Trope & Liberman, 2003; 2010).

Important for our purposes, construal level theory suggests that low construal level is a more situationally sensitive form of cognition than high construal level (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). Low construal level, by definition, implies a relatively detailed focus on the immediate situation, whereas high construal level is necessarily a disengagement from the current situation (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010). This disengagement is what allows more stable cues, such as long-term goals or commitments, to exert more influence on judgment and decision-making (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). Put differently: construal level theory suggests that we need to take a step back, at least metaphorically, and disengage from situational details to be able to focus on our long-term goals and commitments (Fujita, 2011). In line with this, high construal level has been shown to facilitate, and low construal level to impede, the influence of long-term goals on behavior. Soman (1998), for instance, found that the relative weight of travel time (a short-term cost) decreased and that of a monetary reward (a long-term pay off) increased for the decision whether or not to engage in a certain action (e.g. shopping at a certain store) when people were brought in higher (vs. lower) levels of construal. In a similar vein, Fujita and Carnevale (2012) showed that low construal level makes dieters more easily give in to temptation, whereas high construal level is associated with increased dieting effectiveness (see also Fujita & Han, 2009).

We suggest that a similar process is at work in the context of feeling trusted. After all, we have conceptualized responding cooperatively to feeling trusted as motivated by long-term goals (i.e. reciprocity and reputation) and responding non-cooperatively as a short-term temptation. If this conceptualization is accurate, high construal level should facilitate cooperation, whereas low construal level should impede this. To be sure: we do not suggest that low construal level necessarily

makes it more likely that the trustee takes undue advantage of the trustor (e.g. by displaying antisocial behaviors). Rather, we argue that because of low construal level focus on the current situation, the ‘pull’ of longer term goals and commitments is drowned out by the need to attend to situational, fleeting, cues – leading to non-cooperation, rather than actual exploitation. It is thus quite possible that a low construal level trustee holds a commitment to cooperation, but is simply less able to act upon it (Fujita, 2011).

2.2 Overview

In sum, feeling trusted presents the trustee with dual motivations: one may be motivated to reciprocate in order to reap the long-term benefits of an established trusting relationship with the trustor and to create a reputation for trustworthiness for oneself. Conversely, one may be tempted to not cooperate in order to reap the short term benefits associated with that behavior (e.g. not being monitored, the possibility to focus on other concerns). Construal level regulates the motivational push of both aims: for high construal level the long-term concerns typically outweighs the short-term ones, whereas the reverse is true for low construal level. Thus, we argue that high construal level is likely to facilitate cooperative responses to feeling trusted, whereas low construal level impedes these responses.

We tested these predictions in two studies. In much the same way as we combine applied and social psychological approaches in our theoretical arguments, we designed our studies so as to reflect the more popular research paradigms in these two fields to study feeling trusted effects. Study 2.1 was a controlled experiment, which is the preferred paradigm for social psychological to study trust processes (Boksem et al., 2013; Croson & Buchan, 1999; DeBruine, 2002; Delgado, Frank & Phelps, 2005; McCabe, Houser, Ryan, Smith, & Trouard, 2001; Stouten, De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2006). We used a “trust game” (Berg, et al., 1995) in which participants played for real money. In line with prior research (Pillutla et al., 2003), we manipulated whether participants felt trusted by

varying the trusting actions from their interaction partner in the trust game. We used a validated priming procedure to manipulate construal level (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004). We operationalized cooperation as the amount of money that participants transferred back to their interaction partner.

Study 2.2 was a multisource organizational study focusing on leader-employee interactions. Survey data have already been used to show the relationship between the extent to which employees feel trusted and their cooperative responses, primarily in the organizational and applied psychology literatures (Brower, et al., 2009; Lau & Lam, 2008; Salamon & Robinson, 2008). We assessed the extent to which employees felt trusted by their supervisor, and also employees' dispositional construal level. We asked the employee's supervisor to assess employee cooperation in terms of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). OCBs include behaviors as varied as voluntarily helping one's supervisor and colleagues, defending the organization when it is criticized, and speaking up to improve the way in which work is organized (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Moonman & Blakely, 1995). Displaying OCBs is thus a form of cooperation as it supports the collective and its members, at potential short term costs of the individual (e.g. because he or she may be temporarily unable to focus on his/her in-role requirements). Yet, in the long term, individual organization members often benefit from displaying OCBs (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009).

2.3 Study 2.1

2.3.1 Method

Participants. We recruited participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (AMT). Participant recruitment through AMT, an online platform bringing together supply and demand for relatively small tasks, has been increasing over the last few years (Buhrmeister, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

Studies show no noticeable differences in data quality between data obtained in the lab or through AMT (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Samples obtained through AMT tend to be more representative of the working population, however, than samples obtained in the lab (Ipeirotis, 2010). Perhaps because of this, data collection through AMT has been gaining in popularity among organizational scholars (e.g. Cryder, Loewenstein, & Scheines, 2013; Uhlmann, Heaphy, Ashford, Zhu, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013) as well as all across the social sciences (e.g. Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Evangelidis, & Van den Bergh, 2013; Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012).

Participants were paid \$1.00 plus the amount of money they decided to keep in the interaction with the other partner (see below). Inclusion criteria stated that participants should be employed in an organization and that they should have a supervisor. Seventy participants met the inclusion criteria. (32 men, 38 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.04$; $SD = 10.18$). In terms of highest completed level of education, 45.7% of participants held a high school degree, 44.3% held an undergraduate degree, 5.7% held a graduate degree and 4.3% held a postgraduate degree.

Design. We randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions that resulted from orthogonally manipulating construal level (high vs. low) and feeling trusted (high vs. low).

Procedure. The study was introduced to participants as being about “personal and work experiences”. The procedure consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of a validated procedure to prime construal level developed by Freitas et al. (2004). As part of this procedure, participants are asked to provide either superordinate goals (high construal level) or subordinate means (low construal level) for a goal one may have in life (e.g. ‘maintain and improve your health’). In the high level condition participants were asked why they would strive to attain this goal (i.e. ‘why would you want to maintain and improve your health?’). After providing an answer (e.g. ‘to live a long life’) participants were again prompted to explain why they held that goal (e.g. ‘why would you want to live a long life?’), and so on. In the low construal level condition participants were asked how they

would reach the goal (e.g. 'how would you want to maintain and improve your health?'). This procedure was repeated four times for two different target goals ('maintain and improve your health' and 'dress nicely'). This procedure has been used successfully to induce high versus low construal level across a number of contexts (e.g., Freitas et al., 2004; Fujita & Roberts, 2010; McCrea, Wieber, & Myers, 2012).

After participants had completed the priming procedure, we introduced them to the second part of the study: a trust game (Berg et al. 1995). In the trust game there are two players. The structure of play is as follows. First, Player 1 receives an endowment from the experimenter (\$ 1 in the current study). This Player is free to decide how much of this money he or she transfers to Player 2. Any amount of money that Player 1 transfers to Player 2 gets tripled. Thus, if Player 1 decides to transfer \$ 0.50, Player 2 receives \$ 1.50; if Player 1 transfers \$ 1, Player 2 receives \$ 3 and so on. Player 2 is then free to decide how much of the money (s)he received to transfer back to Player 1. For Player 1, the transfer of money to Player 2 is thus an action signaling trust as (s)he totally depends on the other Player to obtain outcomes. That is, Player 2 might transfer back money to Player 1, but Player 2 might also decide to keep everything for her/himself. Given that the initial amount was tripled, a trusting action might pay off.

In our study, all participants were in the role of Player 2, and believed they interacted with Player 1. In reality all actions of Player 1 were preprogrammed. Following Pillutla et al. (2003) we manipulated whether Player 2 (the participant) felt trusted by Player 1 by varying the amount of money (s)he received from Player 1. In the *high feeling trusted* condition, Player 1 transferred the full endowment (\$ 1.00) to Player 2. Participants in this condition thus received \$3. In the *low feeling trusted* condition, Player 1 only transferred half (\$ 0.50) of the original endowment to Player 2. Participants in this condition thus received \$ 1.50. Research shows that a transfer of less than the full

endowment is seen as a sign of low trust in the trust game (De Cremer, Van Dijk & Pillutla, 2009; Pillutla et al., 2003). We then allowed participants to transfer any part of their endowment to Player 1. The proportion of money transferred to Player 1 constituted our index of cooperation. We told participants that they would be playing multiple rounds, to make sure they had an incentive to establish a cooperative relation with the other player. In reality, all participants only played one round. The amount of money that participants decided to keep was paid to them through AMT's bonus payment system. After participants made their decision on how much to allocate to player 1, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation. None of the participants objected to the procedures followed.

As a manipulation check, we tested the effect of the feeling trusted manipulation using a separate sample drawn from the same population (workers in the AMT system). We made sure no participants in the main study could enroll in the validation study and vice versa. We used a separate sample, as we feared that measuring feeling trusted directly might result in hypothesis guessing. We recruited fifty-one working adults, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.33$, $SD = 9.89$, 23 women (45.1 %) who were paid \$ 0.50 for their participation. We gave participants exactly the same information as participants in our main study, but instead of asking them how much they would like to donate to player 1, we asked to indicate to what extent they felt trusted by player 1, by responding to two items ("I feel trusted by player 1", "Player 1 would like to continue interacting with me", on a 7-point likert scale anchored 'not at all' and 'completely', Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$). A One-way ANOVA with the feeling trusted manipulation as independent variable and the trust-scale as dependent variable revealed a significant effect, $F(1, 46) = 6.51$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$. Inspection of the mean scores revealed that participants in the high feeling trusted condition felt significantly more trusted, $M = 4.46$, $SD = .58$, than participants in the low trust condition, $M = 4.02$, $SD = .57$. This shows our manipulation successfully influences feelings of being trusted.

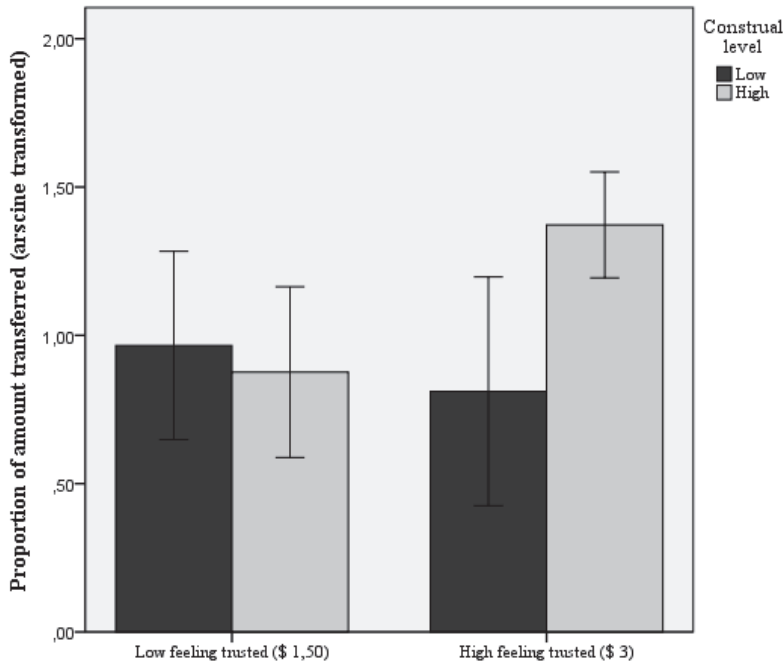
2.3.2 Results

Comprehension check. Before administering the dependent variable we assessed a comprehension check to evaluate if participants understood the procedures. Participants were asked to indicate that if Player 1 would transfer \$ 0.40 to them how much a) Player 1 would have left and b) how large their own endowment would be. All participants responded correctly to these questions (\$ 0.60 and \$ 1.20, respectively).

Hypothesis test. Because the dependent variable was a proportion we used an arcsine transformation, in order to compensate for violations of normality when analyzing proportional data (Miller, 1978). A Construal Level (high vs low) \times Feeling Trusted (high vs. low) ANOVA on cooperation revealed no significant main effect of construal level, $F(1, 66) = 2.16, p = .15, \eta^2 = .03$, or feeling trusted, $F(1, 66) = 1.14, p = .29, \eta^2 = .02$. However, the analysis revealed a significant interaction between these factors, $F(1, 66) = 4.12, p = 0.046, \eta^2 = .06$.¹ Figure 1 depicts this interaction.

¹ We found an interaction in the same direction based on the non-transformed data (using robust standard errors): $\beta = .51, \text{Robust } SE = .23, t(69) = 2.23, p = .02$.

Figure 2.1 Interaction of feeling trusted and construal level on proportion transferred back to player 1 in Study 2.1. Error bars represent 95 % confidence intervals around the mean.



Simple effects analyses showed that participants in the high construal level conditions were more cooperative when they felt highly trusted, $M = 1.37$, $SD = .27$, than when they felt lowly trusted, $M = .87$, $SD = .62$; $F(1, 66) = 4.17$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .06$. In the low construal level conditions no significant difference emerged between participants who felt highly trusted, $M = .81$, $SD = .75$, and those who felt lowly trusted, $M = .97$, $SD = .72$; $F(1, 66) = .55$, $p = .46$.

From a different vantage point, in the conditions in which participants felt highly trusted, cooperation was higher among participants in a high construal level mindset, $M = 1.37$, $SD = .27$, than among participants in a low construal level mindset, $M = .81$, $SD = .75$; $F(1, 66) = 5.02$, $p = .03$,

$\eta^2 = .07$. For participants who felt lowly trusted, it did not matter whether they were in a high level, $M = .87$, $SD = .62$, or a low construal level mindset, $M = .97$, $SD = .72$; $F(1, 66) = .20$, $p = .66$, $\eta^2 = .003$.

2.4 Study 2.2

The results of Study 2.1 support our prediction that feeling trusted (relative to not feeling trusted) increases cooperation, but only among individuals in high (vs. low) level construal mindsets. There are clear advantages in terms of internal validity to a controlled experiment using validated construal level and feeling trusted manipulations, and considering objective cooperative behavior as the dependent variable. However, in this controlled setting, the range of cooperative responses available to a trustee and the interactions that are possible between trustor and trustee are relatively constrained. Therefore, Study 2.2 was a multisource survey among a matched sample of employees and their supervisors in various organizations. Employees rated to what extent they felt trusted by their supervisor and completed a task that measured their dispositional construal level. Supervisors rated the extent to which their employee displayed OCBs.

In addition to the measure probing the extent to which employees felt trusted by their supervisor, we also assessed the extent to which employees trusted their supervisor. The positive relation between trust and displaying OCB is well-established (Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; Robinson & Morrison, 1995). Specifically, trust makes trustors more willing to engage in pro-social behaviors on behalf of the trustee (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavian & Schroeder, 2005). As feeling trusted is a relatively new construct in the literature, we wanted to establish to what extent feeling trusted adds explanatory power to the effect of trust and to what extent the two constructs have unique effects.

2.4.1 Method

Respondents and procedure. Respondents were 893 Dutch employees who voluntarily participated in a large, representative, permanent research panel that is independently managed. Respondents were required to be employed for at least 12 hours per week. They received credit points that could be exchanged for certain gifts of their choice (e.g. movie tickets, discounts etc.) for their participation. Employees were also asked to invite their supervisor to participate in the survey. As an incentive, five tablet computers were raffled off among the participating supervisors. In all, seventy-four supervisors participated in our survey². We conducted our analyses on this matched sample of seventy-four employee-supervisor dyads.

The mean age of the employees was 43.47 ($SD = 10.93$). Thirty nine (41.5 %) were female. Employees worked on average for 12.31 years ($SD = 10.81$) in their current organization and for an average of 8.03 years ($SD = 8.52$) in their current job.

The mean age of the supervisors was 47.47 ($SD = 9.21$). Twenty two of the supervisors (29.3 %) were female. Supervisors on average supervised 2.97 employees ($SD = 2.12$). Supervisors had been employed for an average of 14.08 years ($SD = 9.57$) in their current organization and for an average of 9.52 years ($SD = 7.86$) in their current job.

Measures. To measure the extent to which employees *felt trusted* by their supervisor we used a scale by Salomon and Robinson (2008) which incorporates the dimensions of trust as defined by Schoorman et al. (2007). Items ask respondents to indicate to what extent they feel their supervisor has trust in them as well as to what extent they feel that their supervisor trusts their integrity, competency, good intentions, and benevolence (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much so*).

To assess employees' *dispositional construal level* we used the behavioral identification form, developed by Vallacher and Wegner (1987; 1989). This scale has frequently been used in both laboratory and field settings (e.g. Freitas, Clark, Kim, & Levy, 2009; Freitas, Salovey, & Liberman,

² There were no significant differences between the matched and non-matched employees on any of the variables of interest (demographic variables and the variables in our model).

2001; Hart & Burton, 2012; Vallacher, Wegner, & Somoza, 1987; 1989). This scale asks respondents to indicate a preference for either an abstract (e.g. ‘showing friendliness’) or a concrete (e.g. ‘saying hello’) re-description of an activity (‘greeting someone’). We used a 10-point Likert scale anchored in the concrete and abstract re-descriptions as answer-format (see also Fujita & Robert, 2010).

To assess employee *cooperation* we asked employees’ supervisor to complete the OCBs instrument developed by Moorman and Blakely (1995) with the employee as the target. This scale measures four OCB dimensions: ‘interpersonal helping’ (e.g. ‘This employee voluntarily helps new employees settle into the job’); ‘individual initiative’ (e.g. ‘This employee often motivates others to express their ideas and opinions’); ‘personal industry’ (e.g. ‘This employee performs his/her duties with extra-special care’) and ‘Loyal boosterism’ (e.g. ‘This employee defends the organization when others criticize it’; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much* so).

We measured *trust* with Mayer and Davis’ (1999) four-item trust scale, adapted to have the supervisor as target (e.g. ‘I would be comfortable giving my supervisor complete control over my future in this company’).

2.4.2 Results

Table 1 presents scale means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations (see below).

Test of predictions. We tested our predictions with ordinary least squares regression analysis with age, gender, organizational tenure and job tenure of the employee added in step 1. We added the main effects of feeling trusted and construal level in step 2. We added the interaction between feeling trusted and construal level in step 3. The interaction term was based on mean-centered scores of the predictor variables (Aiken & West, 1991). We conducted separate analyses for each OCB dimension and also an analysis with the total OCB scale as the criterion variable. Table 2 presents the results of these analyses. The analyses revealed significant interactions ($p < .05$) between

feeling trusted and construal level on organizational citizenship behaviors in the expected direction for both the overall OCB scale as well as for the individual initiative, personal industry and loyal boosterism facet scales. A non-significant interaction emerged for interpersonal helping. Figure 2 visually depicts this effect for the overall OCB scale. The interactions on the individual initiative, personal industry and loyal boosterism were similar in shape. We report the simple effects of feeling trusted on OCB at high (+1 *SD*)

Table 2.1 Reliabilities, means, and standard deviations in study 2.2

Predictors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	Mean 43.47	SD 10.93								
2. Gender		-.12*								
3. Organizational Tenure		.59**	-.19**							
4. Feeling trusted		.07*	.06	.06	(.95)					
5. Dispositional construal level		.15**	.08*	.16	.16	(.73)				
6. Interpersonal helping		.03	.17	.23*	.16	(.85)				
7. Individual initiative		.05	.07	.20	.15	.71**	(.84)			
8. Personal industry		.01	.19	.24*	.15	.59**	.66**	(.82)		
9. Loyal boosterism		-.04	.15	.25*	.02	.56**	.59**	.58**	(.88)	
10. Total OCB scale		.02	.17	.20**	.14	.84**	.89**	.82**	.82**	(.94)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

Note: Reliabilities are listed on the diagonal

Table 2.2. Regression Results of Study 2.2 for the Feeling Trusted x Dispositional Construal Level Interaction

Dependent variable	Individual initiative	Interpersonal helping	Personal industry	Loyal boosterism	Total OCB scale
Step 1, R^2 , R^2_{adj}	.13, .08	.17*, .12	.19*, .14	.15*, .1	.21**, .17
Step 2, R^2 , R^2_{adj} , R^2_{change}	.15, .06, .02	.21, .12, .04	.20, .11, .005	.25, .16, .1	.25, .17, .04
Step 3, R^2 , R^2_{adj} , R^2_{change}	.27*, .16, .13	.22, .21, .17	.28*, .20, .19*	.34*, .25, .15*	.35*, .25, .21**
Gender	.31	.52*	.53*	.31	.40*
Age	.002	.01	.001	-.01	.002
Organizational tenure	.02	.004	.02	.02	.01
Feeling trusted	.20	.21	.22	.40**	.26*
Construal level	.16	.07	.09	.08	.11
Feeling trusted x construal level	.27*	.09	.27*	.26*	.23*

N = 75

Table presents β coefficients at step 3.*: $p < .05$,**: $p < .01$.

For gender: 1 = male, 2 = female.

Table 2.3. Simple Effects for the Feeling Trusted x Dispositional Construal Level Interaction in Study 2.2

Dependent variable	Individual initiative	Personal industry	Loyal boosterism	Total OCB scale
Feeling trusted at + 1 SD construal level	.44*	.46**	.63**	.49**
Feeling trusted at - 1 SD construal level	-.05	-.02	.17	.03.
Construal level at + 1 SD feeling trusted	.43**	.35*	.34*	.31*
Construal level at - 1 SD feeling trusted	-.12	-.18	-.17	-.10

N = 75

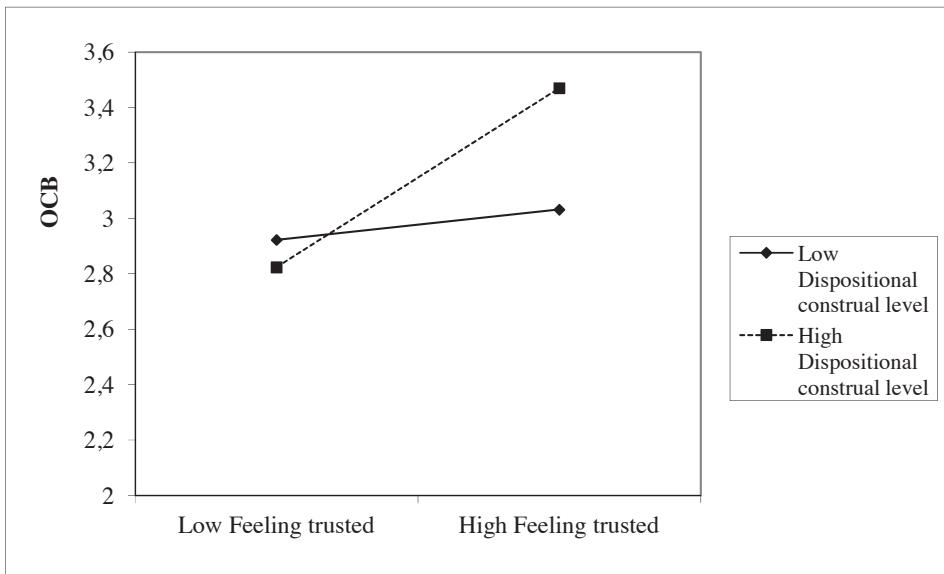
Table presents β coefficients controlling for age, gender and organizational tenure.

*: $p < .05$,

** : $p < .01$.

and low ($-1 SD$) construal level in Table 3. In this table we also report the simple effects of construal level at high ($+1 SD$) and low ($-1 SD$) levels of feeling trusted.

Figure 2.2 Interaction of feeling trusted and trait cognitive abstraction on OCB in study 2.



Supplementary analyses. The goal of our supplementary analyses was to investigate whether *both* feeling trusted and trust contribute to the explained variance in OCB. Therefore we, first, tested whether the interaction of trust and construal level affected OCBs in a comparable manner as the interaction between feeling trusted and construal level. Secondly, we tested whether the interaction between feeling trusted and construal level when we controlled for the influence of trust.

Hence, we conducted additional OLS regression analysis in which we used trust and its interaction with construal level as predictor variables. We found a significant interaction (albeit – in terms of effect size – a substantially weaker one than the interaction of feeling trusted and construal level) effect of trust and dispositional construal level on OCB (the full scale): $\beta = .02$, $SE = .007$, $t = 2.8$, $p < .01$. We also obtained a significant main effect of trust, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .009$, $t = 2.8$, $p < .01$, but no main effect of construal level, $\beta = .02$, $SE = .07$, $t = .3$, $p = .76$. In contrast to the interaction we found between feeling trusted and construal level, we found a significant effect of trust for both high (+1 SD) level construal, $\beta = .04$, $t = 10.42$, $p < .001$, as well as for low (-1 SD) level construal, $\beta = .01$, $t = 3.41$, $p = .001$. From a different vantage point, we found a significant effect of construal level for high (+1 SD) trust, $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.54$, $p = .01$, but not for low (-1 SD) trust, $\beta = -.14$, $t = 1.95$, $p = .06$. We found similar interaction effects of trust and construal level on interpersonal initiative, $\beta = .02$, $SE = .009$, $t = 2.76$, $p < .01$, personal industry, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .009$, $t = 2.6$, $p < .01$, and loyal boosterism, $\beta = .02$, $SE = .009$, $t = 2.4$, $p = .02$, facet scales, but not on interpersonal helping, $\beta = .01$, $SE = .011$, $t = .96$, $p = .34$. As before, we controlled for gender, age and organizational tenure of the focal employee in all these analyses.

Furthermore, we tested whether the interactive effect of feeling trusted and construal level on OCB would still emerge when we controlled for trust. Hence, we conducted hierarchical OLS regression with trust, age, gender and organizational tenure added in step 1, the main effects feeling trusted and construal level in step 2 and the interaction between feeling trusted and construal level added in step 3. We obtained a significant feeling trusted by construal level interaction on the total scale, $\beta = .25$, $SE = .07$, $t = 3.11$, $p < .01$, and on the individual initiative, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .09$, $t = 3.28$, $p < .01$, loyal boosterism, $\beta = .28$, $SE = .09$, $t = 3.00$, $p < .01$, and personal industry, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .10$, $t = 2.90$, $p < .01$, facet scales. We did not find a significant interaction on the interpersonal helping-subscale, $\beta = .09$, $SE = .13$, $t = .68$, $p = .50$. This analyses revealed a significant main effect of trust (for the total scale: $\beta = .02$, $SE = .01$, $t = 2.23$, $p = .03$, effects on the subscales were comparable). These analyses thus show that feeling trusted affects OCB, even when

controlling for trust, adding support to our contention that the effects of trust and feeling trusted are largely independent³.

Finally, following the recommendations offered by Spector and Brannick (2011) we also tested our hypothesis with OLS regression without inclusion of the control variables. None of the effects obtained in the main analyses changed in significance level, apart from the feeling trusted x construal level interaction effect on the loyal boosterism facet scale (without the control variables, $\beta = .14$, $SE = .10$, $t = 1.44$, $p = .15$).

In sum, even though we did find a significant trust by construal level interaction effect, its size was substantially smaller than the feeling trusted by construal level interaction effect we describe above. Additionally, the shape of the interaction was slightly different in the sense that we found effects of trust for both high and low construal level. Furthermore, the significance of the feeling trusted by construal level interaction effect was unchanged when we controlled for trust. These results increase our confidence that the effects of trust and feeling trusted are independent.

2.5 Discussion

In this chapter we proposed and tested the idea that feeling trusted promotes cooperation when trustees focus on the long-term benefits of maintaining valuable relationships, rather than on the short-term benefits of displaying non-cooperative behavior. We studied this by using construal level theory to differentiate between situations in which long-term concerns dominate decision-making (i.e. high construal level) or, rather, short term concerns (i.e. low construal level). High construal level, we argued, facilitates the effect of long-term motivations of relationship maintenance associated with feeling trusted, whereas low construal level impedes these effects. In line with this argument, we showed in two studies that feeling trusted

³ Brower et al. (2008) studied the effect of yet another related construct: the level of trust that a supervisor reports to have in an employee (rather than the level of trust that an employee feels to receive from his/her supervisor). Trust of a supervisor in an employee may influence employee behavior in different ways from employees' feeling of the extent to which they are trusted by their supervisor. For instance, actual trust of a supervisor in an employee may affect employee behavior without them actually feeling trusted. To test this, we measured trust of the supervisor in the employee, using the same scale we used to measure trust, developed by Mayer and David (1999), but with the employee as target. We did not find a significant being trusted x construal level interaction effect, and neither did controlling for being trusted and the being trusted x construal level interaction substantially affect the results for feeling trusted that have been reported in the main analyses. None of the effects we report as significant became insignificant.

is associated with increased cooperation, either in the form of increased monetary donations in a trust game (Study 2.2.1) or as OCB (Study 2.2), but only under conditions of high construal level. In the upcoming sections we discuss the implications of these findings for theory and practice, and we elaborate upon strengths and limitations. We also offer suggestions for further research.

2.5.1 Theoretical implications

This research carries important implications for the emerging literature on feeling trusted. We proposed and tested a framework to understand why and under what circumstances feeling trusted leads to cooperation. Cooperation, we argued, can be conceptualized as an investment that mainly has long-term, relational benefits for the trustee in terms of a lasting relation with the trustor and a higher likelihood of establishing beneficial relationships with other interaction partners (reputation) – but may thus be costly in the short-term. We are not the first to conceptualize cooperation in terms of a social or temporal dilemma (e.g. Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011; Dawes, Van De Kragt, & Orbell, 1988; Kopelman, Weber, & Messick, 2002; Lind, 2001). For instance, the decision to accord trust to another has sometimes been described as a ‘fundamental social dilemma’ in the sense that one has to balance the risk of being taken advantage of against the benefits of cooperation (Lind & Tyler, 1988). We suggest that in the situation in which one feels trusted one is faced with the opposite dilemma: one has to decide whether it is worth giving up on the long-term benefits of having a trusting relationship with the trustor in order to obtain some short-term benefits. This implies that, viewed from the trustee side, the situation in which the trustee feels trusted can be seen as a dual-motive conflict. In this way, our theoretical model gives insight in the motivational bases of both cooperative and non-cooperative responses to feeling trusted and can thus be used to arrive at an understanding of *why* people opt for one or the other strategy as well as under which circumstances they are likely to do so.

A second implication of this research is that we answer to recent calls in the literature for more investigation of the cognitive and intrapersonal drivers of cooperation in organizations (e.g. Bolino, Harvey, & Bacherach, 2012). Much of the literature here is grounded in a self-regulation approach – showing that

cooperation requires self-regulation – in which self-regulation is seen as the effortful inhibition of impulses (e.g. Bolino, 1999; see also Fujita, 2011). Even though high construal level has been linked to improved self-regulation skills (Fujita & Carnevale, 2010) we depart from a different perspective: we show how the cognitive construal of the situation crucially determines cooperative responses. When one is predominantly focused on the immediate situation, one is unlikely to act on long-term concerns. However, cooperation requires that one is able to act on long-term concerns and forgo one's short term self-interest. In this sense, thus, we both supplement and add to the self-regulation account of cooperation; we agree that certain (short-term) impulses have to be overcome for cooperation but we show that this not always requires effortful inhibition. Rather, sometimes differently construing the situation at hand suffices (Fujita & Han, 2009; Fujita & Roberts, 2010; Van Dijke, De Cremer, Brebels, & Van Quaquebeke, 2013)

This research is one of the first to introduce construal level theory in interpersonal and organizational contexts (see also Popper, 2013). As noted by, among others, Bolino et al. (2012) there is a shortage of research addressing within-person and cognitive processes driving organizational behaviors, especially with regard to cooperative behaviors like OCB. In contrast, construal level theory has found wide application precisely in the intrapersonal and cognitive domains (Burgoon et al., 2013), such as activity enactment (Trope & Liberman, 1998) or categorization (Rim, Uleman, & Trope, 2009). Up to now, however, it has scarcely been used to explore interpersonal and organizational processes (Popper, 2013). With this research we hope to have contributed to the integration of within-person, cognitive processes (like construal level) in the relation between two quintessential interpersonal phenomena: trusting relations and cooperation (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2007). By doing so, we also showed that construal level can be used to derive meaningful and testable propositions about the interpersonal domain, thereby further extending the scope of the theory.

Particularly interesting in relation to the latter point is that we conceptualized and studied construal level as the cognitive mechanism that *determines* the relative weight of long-term and short-term benefits and costs in judgment and decision-making (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Although this effect of construal level is

well-established in the literature and an essential part of construal level theory (Fiedler, 2007; Ledgerwood, Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 1998), most empirical investigations have focused on the antecedents of construal level (i.e., psychological distance, operationalized as temporal, spatial or social distance) rather than on the implications of construal level itself (Nussbaum, et al., 2003; Henderson, et al., 2011; Todorov, et al., 2007). Moreover, our results show that we can use the temporal focus that is embedded in construal level to derive meaningful predictions for situations where short-term and long-term drives steer in opposite directions (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1995). Hence, specifically in this sense, the scope of construal level theory is potentially much larger than is typically assumed.

2.5.2 Practical implications

From a practical perspective, the most important implication of our findings is that whether or not employees react cooperatively to trusting cues depend on how these cues get construed. Research has indicated that construal level mindsets may be affected by certain real-world antecedents which are highly practically relevant, in particular some aspects of psychological distance (i.e. temporal, spatial, social distance and hypotheticality; Trope & Liberman, 2010). As we noted before, higher distances are associated with higher levels of construal and smaller distances with low levels of construal. Because of this, our research thus points to the perils of too close relations between employees or between employees and management: when relationships get too close, levels of construal may drop and cooperative responses to signals of trust may become less likely.

Secondly, our results revealed that when trustees have low construal level mindsets, they are less likely to cooperate even if they feel trusted. However, a failure to cooperate may substantially impair trust (Mayer et al., 2012). In this way, trust and feeling trusted may be locked in a vicious cycle under conditions of low trustee construal level. A failure to reciprocate may lead to lower trust, which may make it less likely that one will feel trusted, making effective cooperation even more unlikely, and so on (Seppällä, Lipponen, Pirttilä-Backman, & Lipsanen, 2012). Trustee high construal level can thus truly be seen as a ‘trigger’ that allows for

this vicious cycle to turn itself into a virtuous one. Hence, because of this, organizations may be advised to promote employee high construal level mindsets, or to select for it, to make sure that trusting signals are likely to be cooperatively responded to.

2.5.3 Strengths, limitations and suggestions for further research

A primary strength of this chapter is that we combine different research methodologies: an experiment with employees as participants (Study 2.2.1) and a multi-source organizational field study (Study 2.2). Feeling trusted research in the social psychology literature has typically, though not exclusively, based itself either solely on experimental studies (e.g. Boksem et al., 2013; DeBruine, 2006), whereas applied psychologists have mainly relied on field-data (e.g. Brower et al., 2009; Salamon & Robinson, 2009), but usually not both. The integration of both methodologies, we suggest, addresses the weak points of both. For instance, the main strength of experimental research is that it is uniquely able to establish causality (Martin, 2008). However, commonly noted drawbacks of experiments, especially for applied fields such as management and organizational behavior, are that experiments may be lacking in ecological validity (Levitt & List, 2007). AMT has proven to offer an excellent way to reduce reliance on student samples in experimental research (Paolacci, et al., 2010), offsetting these worries to some extent, though not completely (Birnbaum, 2004). Yet, Study 2.2, in which we used a multi-source design and relied on a sample of employees and their supervisors, provides external as well as ecological validity to our findings.

A suggestion for further research has to do with our suggestion above that high construal level mindset may be a trigger for a virtuous trust to cooperation cycle. Further research that involves multiple rounds in a trust game and longitudinal survey designs may be required to understand how organizations may promote high construal level mindsets among employees in a lasting manner to encourage cooperation.

2.6 Concluding remarks

Lau et al. (2014) noted that George MacDonald, a Scottish writer, once remarked that “being trusted is a greater compliment than being loved” (p.112). That may be so, but our research implies that a long term

focus on relational benefits (i.e. high construal level) that might accrue to the trustee from maintaining the relationship is required to return the compliment.

Chapter 3. Situational Consistency in Punishment is determined by Construal Level

“How can we adjudge to summary and shameful death a fellow-creature innocent before God, and whom we feel to be so? - Does that state it aright? You sign sad assent. Well, I too feel that, the full force of that. It is Nature. But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the King.” – Captain Vere’s speech, *Billy Budd: Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, Herman Melville (1924/1962).

In Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*, the innocuous Billy Budd, a young sailor on an English warship in the eighteenth century, kills the plotting master-at-arms John Claggart. The murder occurs right after Claggart accuses Billy of plotting a mutiny. This accusation causes extreme agony for Billy, who sees no resolution but to deal Claggart a powerful blow to the head. After the murder, the ship’s captain, Captain Vere, who is personally sympathetic towards Billy, convenes a court martial consisting of three fellow officers, who decide to acquit Billy on the grounds of the unusual circumstances of his crime, the fact that it was not pre-meditated and their sympathies for him. Captain Vere then persuasively intervenes and in a long and strongly rhetorical speech, argues that they have a duty as officers of the navy to decide on punishment *not* on the basis of personal sympathies or exceptional circumstances but purely and simply on the basis of the law, which proscribes hanging as the appropriate punishment for the murder of an officer by a sailor. Captain Vere manages to convince all three members of the court and Billy Budd is hanged at the great personal pain of everyone on the ship, not in the least Captain Vere himself.

We observe here two radically different perspectives on the punishment of norm transgressors dramatically opposed to each other. One perspective, exemplified by Captain Vere, regards punishment primarily as a way to enforce general and unbending rules even if they contradict personal sympathies and despite the presence of potential mitigating circumstances. The other perspective is exemplified by the officers in the court martial, who view the circumstances in which the transgression took place as important

for the decision on punishment. This distinction between principle-based punishment, which disregards situational factors (Captain Vere) and punishment that does take situational factors into account (the court martial) echoes distinctions that have been made in various literatures. In philosophical work, for instance, retributive, situationally invariant punishment focused on restoring the moral order, is often contrasted with deterrent or rehabilitative punishment for which personal and situational factors are far more important (Cotton, 2000; Gromet & Darley, 2006). Criminologists and legal scholars, on the other hand, differentiate between legal formalism, which holds that judges apply laws and rules in a disinterested manner (Guthrie, Rachlinski, & Wistrich, 2007), and legal realism, which holds that situational factors can and do influence legal decisions (Danziger, et al., 2011a; Kozinski, 1992).

The issue of the desirability or normativity of cross-situational punishment lies of course beyond the scope of (social) psychology proper. The question whether, and if so to what extent, situational influences can and do play a role in punitive decision-making, however, seems cut out for psychologists to address. Yet, psychological research on punishment has largely been silent on this matter. Some studies indicate that punishment mainly results from a drive to restore moral order (Carlsmith, 2006; Darley, 2002) and that punitive judgments are (thus) largely insensitive to situational cues and influences (e.g., Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Darley & Pittman, 2003; Giardini, Andrighetto, & Conte, 2010). Other work indicates that situational factors, such as a previous, unrelated, experience of injustice (Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999) or self-construal activation (Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007) shape punitive decision-making. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no research has addressed factors that determine whether people adopt a more or less situationally consistent punishment style. This is problematic, not only because psychology has as of yet failed to address a question whose importance has already been acknowledged in several adjacent literatures but also because we cannot hope to fully understand punitive behavior and decision-making if we have no insight in what factors determine the drivers of punitive behavior under specific circumstances.

In this chapter we thus set out to address precisely the question what factors determine whether or

not situational influences affect punitive decision-making. We argue that the situational sensitivity of the punishing actor's cognition is a crucial determinant of the cross-situational consistency of punishment decisions. We use construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) to explore this. Construal level has been identified as the cognitive mechanism that determines sensitivity to situational cues (Ledgerwood, Trope & Liberman, 2010). High (abstract) construal implies disengaging oneself from the current situation, thus facilitating the influence of situationally invariant cues (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010), such as moral principles. Low (concrete) construal, in contrast, is defined by a focus on the current situation and, therefore a stronger influence of situational cues (Ledgerwood, Wakslak, & Wang, 2010). This leads us to argue that high construal level is associated with a stronger expression of moral principles in punitive decision-making, and therefore more cross-situational consistency in punitive responses. Low construal level, in contrast, is associated with a more pragmatic punitive decision-making style, and thus *less* situational consistency in punishment.

With this research, we aim to take a step to addressing the issue of the situational consistency (or inconsistency) of punishment within the psychological literature. We contend that to obtain a full understanding of the factors and circumstances that drive punishment, it is vital to connect it to non-punishment-related, deep-level psychological mechanisms, such as construal level. In doing so, we provide a much-needed synthesis in the literature by showing that both moral concerns as well as relatively *amoral* situational influences can drive punitive decision, although under different circumstances. Finally, we extend construal level theory, which thus far has mainly found application in the intrapersonal and cognitive domains (Trope & Liberman, 2010), into the interpersonal domain of the delivery of punishment of norm transgressions.

3.1 Theoretical background

3.1.1 Cross-situational consistency in punishment

Carlsmith (2006) argued that the main motivation for punishment is to restore the moral order that

has been damaged on account of a transgression, allowing little room for situational factors to influence punishing decisions. Various strands of research offer support for this claim. For instance, it has been shown that people base their recommendations regarding punishment solely on the type of norm transgressed, and they are insensitive to information that is arguably relevant but situationally variant, such as the frequency of previous offenses by the same perpetrator (Carlsmith, et al., 2002). These effects are observed even among people who have a stated believe in the relevance of such information (Carlsmith, 2006). Furthermore, whereas some studies in the mock jury literature suggest some plasticity of punitive judgments resulting from situational cues (e.g., the race or gender of the defendant, Kerr, 1978; Kerr, Hymes, Anderson , & Weathers, 1995; Tsoudis, 2002), a meta-analysis by Mazzella and Feingold (1994) found little robust evidence for such associations. In fact, cues such as gender and race are more likely to be regarded as information to infer culpability (e.g., men are more likely to be perceived as guilty than women; Fisher, 1997) rather than shaping subsequent punitive judgments (i.e., judgments related to the severity of a sentence; Weiten & Diamond, 1979).

Other research that supports this purported insensitivity of punitive judgment to situational influences has documented the influence of “sacred values” on punishment (Tetlock, 2003). Sacred values are values that one is unwilling to compromise. For example, Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Lerner and Green (2000) showed that responses to transgressions (e.g. omitting to save the life of someone in need) are quite insensitive to the circumstances in which a sacred value is compromised (e.g. high costs involved). This, once again, indicates a general insensitivity to situational influences with respect to punitive judgments about normative transgressions. Providing even stronger evidence, Skitka and Mullen (2002) showed that when people believe they possess a “moral mandate” (the belief that their actions are morally warranted), they punish moral transgressions indiscriminately and without regard for procedural constraints (see also Graham & Haidt, 2011).

In sum, a sizeable number of studies show that punishment decisions are often driven by moral

principles and norms held to be important by the punishing agent (Carlsmith, 2006). Moral principles require some cross-situational validity (Eyal, et al., 2008), as a rule or principle that applies to just one case or situation is often not considered to be properly ‘moral’ (Habermas, 1988). This seems to leave little room for situational influences on punitive decision-making. Yet, other research has uncovered cases in which punitive decisions are driven by non-moral, contextual, cues. One flagrant example is a study by Danziger and colleagues (2011a) who showed that the time of day (right after or long after a food break) substantially influenced punishment decisions of professional parole judges (see also Danziger, et al., 2011b). Other contextual influences that have been shown to influence punishment decisions are previous, unrelated, incidents of misconduct (Goldberg, et al., 1999), self-construal activation (Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007) and group membership (Braun & Gollwitzer, 2012). These are all influences that are relatively fleeting (they may or may not apply in the next situation in which a punitive decision has to be taken) and, hence, situational (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Whether or not punitive decisions are influenced by situational, fleeting factors should depend first and foremost on how successfully an actor can disengage from such influences (Lewin, 1951). We suggest that cross-situational consistency in punishment should be facilitated by a mindset that helps to immunize the actor to the press of the situation, allowing him or her to focus on higher-order principles or norms (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). In contrast, the effect of situational, fleeting, cues on punishment should be facilitated by a mindset that allows the actor to flexibly attend to precisely those cues (Ledgerwood, Trope & Chaiken, 2010). Construal level has been identified as the cognitive mechanism that regulates the situational sensitivity of cognition (Trope & Liberman, 2010), and we thus focus on construal level to explore this phenomenon.

3.1.2 Construal level theory and principle-based moral thinking

Construal-level theory was developed to explain the phenomenon of cognitive abstraction, its consequences and its antecedents (see Trope & Liberman, 2010 for an overview). According to the theory,

high construal level, by definition, entails a focus on a limited number of decontextualized pieces of information that are presumed to be relatively stable (that is: true and valid across situations and over distances; Liberman & Trope, 2008). In contrast, low construal level entails a relatively unstructured focus on a relatively large amount of information, including more peripheral, fleeting information. Hence, a high construal level representation of a given stimulus or event (e.g. a transgression of a rule or norm) entails a focus on relatively few characteristics of that stimulus or event that are presumed to be relatively stable; a low construal level of the same event, in contrast, encompasses more, and in particular more concrete, information (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

At its core, construal level is thus regulates the situational sensitivity and dependency of cognition and, because of that, judgment and decision-making (see Förster & Dannenberg, 2010 and Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010 for more extensive arguments). Essentially, abstraction implies taking a metaphorical step back to be able to see ‘the forest for the trees’ (Burgoon, et al., 2013), that is: to be able to oversee the whole picture rather than each and every elementary detail of it (Trope & Liberman, 2010). High construal level, thus, by definition, implies a certain detachment from the more variable and fleeting elements of the situation. Low construal level, in contrast, implies a focus on precisely those elements (Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006). Because of that, construal level affects the relative weight of situationally variant and situationally invariant cues on decision-making (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012): situationally invariant cues carry more relative weight under high construal level, whereas situationally variant cues are more effective under low construal level (Ledgerwood, Wakslak et al., 2010). In the normative domain, on which we focus here, perhaps the prime example of such situationally invariant cues is moral norms and principles, as we discuss above. It thus stands to reason that punishment under high construal level is more likely to be driven by moral principles.

Some evidence from other literatures provides initial plausibility to this latter proposition. Eyal et al. (2008), for instance, showed that moral judgments tend to be more severe under circumstances that favor

high construal level (i.e. large distances) rather than circumstances that favor low construal level – an effect they explained by proposing a stronger effect of moral norms under these circumstances (see also Ågerström & Björklund, 2009a;b; but note this research has been difficult to replicate, see Gong & Medin, 2012). In line with this, other research has shown that high construal level facilitates the expression of situationally invariant cues in judgment and behavior, such as personal values (Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, & Chaiken, 2009) and social norms (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012). Based on this, we propose that high construal level is associated with a norm-driven, or principled, punitive decision-making style. This principled decision-making style, in turn, we argue, explains why high construal level facilitates situationally consistent decision-making.

Low construal level, in contrast, attenuates the influence of situationally invariant cues (such as moral principles) and facilitates the expression of situational variations in judgment and decision-making (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010). This, we argue, results in a relatively pragmatic punitive decision-making style that mainly focuses on the needs and the affordances of the situation, resulting in *less* cross-situational consistency in punitive behaviors. There is also some indirect support for this contention to be found in different literatures. Kivetz and Tyler (2007) showed, for instance, that low construal level is associated with the activation of the ‘pragmatic self’, rather than the ‘ideal self’ – in other words: a focus on what is achievable right now, rather than that what one wants to achieve. Similarly, Danziger et al. (2012) showed that people adopt a pragmatic mindset in circumstances that favor low construal level (i.e. when they have to choose for themselves) but adopt an idealistic mindset in conditions that favor high construal level (i.e. when they have to give advice to another).

3.2 Overview of predictions and studies

Bring these arguments together, we suggest that an important, but often overlooked aspect of punishment is the extent to which it is driven by the application of general moral principles or, conversely, shaped by contextual cues that may vary across situations. We proposed that punishment driven by moral principles is facilitated by a mindset that allows one to immunize oneself to the direct context and, because of

that, to focus on more situationally invariant informational cues. Punishment is, then, more likely to be driven by situational influences when the punishing actor is unable to detach him- or herself from the immediate situation.⁴ We propose that construal level is precisely the cognitive phenomenon that regulates the situational dependency of cognition, and therefore also that of a punishing actor's punishment decisions. High construal level implies immunization against situational influences, thus allowing for a stronger influence of moral rules, whereas low construal level implies sensitivity to situational cues. Based on this argument, we posit the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3.1: High construal level leads to cross-situationally consistent punishment; low construal level leads to relatively cross-situationally inconsistent punishment.

Hypothesis 3.2: The effect of construal level on the cross-situational consistency of punishment is mediated by principle-based moral cognition.

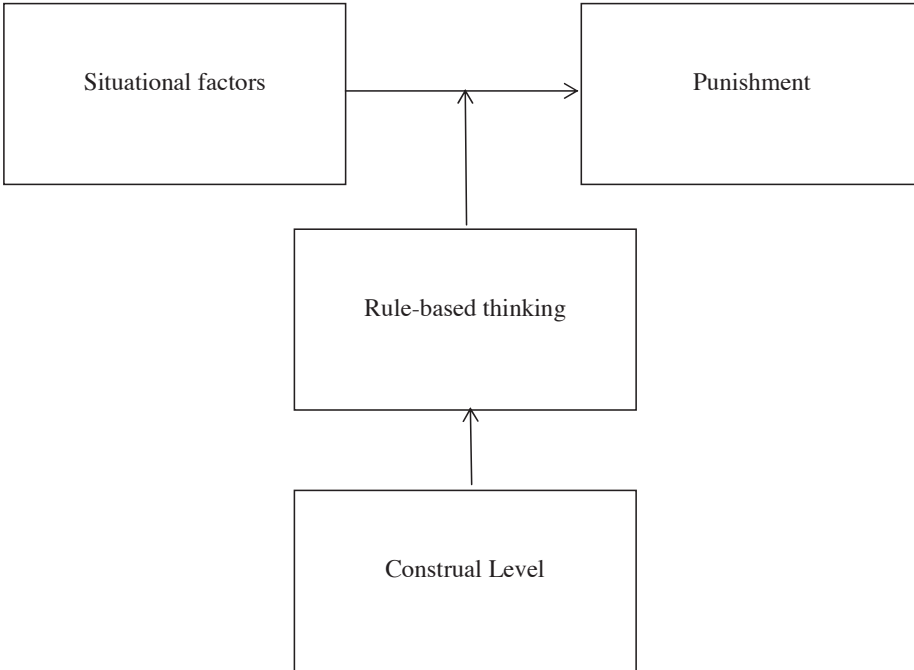
We tested these hypotheses in three studies. Study 3.1 and 3.2 were both experiments. In both studies we manipulated construal level using a well-validated priming technique (Freitas, et al., 2004). In each study we focused on a relevant situational factor that is known to influence punishment decisions. In study 1 we focused on the social status of the perpetrator. Perpetrator status is often studied in the literatures on punishment and ethical decision-making (e.g. Bowles & Gelfand, 2010; Gollwitzer & Keller, 2010; Lieberman & Linke, 2007; Reese, Steffens, & Jonas, 2013). For instance, Fragale and colleagues (2009) showed that low (rather than high) status is sometimes considered an excuse for engaging in norm transgressing behaviors. Yet, variations in norm transgressors' status should normally not be relevant for the applicability of moral norms (Polman, Petit, & Wiesenfeld, 2013). We thus predicted that perpetrator status influence punitive decisions, but only among punishing actors in a low construal level mindset. High construal level, in contrast, was predicted to immunize punishing actors to the effects of perpetrator status when deciding upon punishment.

⁴ Note that the influence of a situation on punishment has no bearing on the severity of this punishment. Situational influences (e.g., involved self-interest, mitigating circumstances) may make people harsher but also more lenient in punishing than what moral rules proscribe.

Study 3.2 was another experiment. In this study we focused on involved self-interest (i.e., whether punishing actors are rewarded for punishing norm transgressions or not) as a situational determinant of punishment. Self-interest has often been studied in the literatures on punishment and ethical decision-making (e.g. Cramwinckel, De Cremer, & van Dijke, 2013; Hoogervorst, et al., 2010; Moore & Loewenstein, 2004). The presence or absence of incentives for punishing norm transgressions is a situational characteristic that should have no bearing on the content or relevance of a moral rule. Hence, we expected that only punishing actors in a low construal level mindset would adapt their punitive behavior to rewards for punishing norm transgressions. Actors in a high construal level mindset, in contrast, were expected to be immune to such rewards.

Study 3.3 was an organizational field study designed to provide external validity to our findings. We recruited supervisor – subordinate dyads from a wide variety of organizations. We developed a new scale and had subordinates rate the cross-situational consistency of their supervisor’s punishment using that scale. Supervisors indexed their dispositional construal level as well as their principle-based moral thinking style. We tested whether high construal level is related to cross-situational consistency in punishment, via the mediating mechanism of principled based moral thinking.

Figure 3.1: Theoretical model in Chapter 3



3.3 Study 3.1

3.3.1 Method

Participants and design. We recruited 101 adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.06$, $SD = 10.9$; 43 women (42.6%)) from the Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) web service. Participants were paid \$0.75 (€0.55 at the time of the study) for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions resulting from orthogonally manipulating construal level (high vs. low) and perpetrator status (high vs. low).

Procedure. Respondents were led to believe that they would participate in two different studies that were combined for reasons of convenience. The first study was actually our *construal-level* manipulation. We used the why/how construal level priming procedure developed by Freitas et al. (2004). This well-validated procedure is known to reliably induce high- versus low construal level mindsets (McCrea, et al., 2012).

Participants were presented with a goal that one could have in life and asked to generate subordinate means to achieve this goal (low construal level) versus superordinate purposes that this goal serves (high construal level). For example, we asked participants to indicate why (versus how) they would maintain and improve their health. After a participant provided an answer (e.g., why?: “to live a long life”; or how?: “by going to the gym regularly”), they were again asked why they answered as such or how they would achieve that aim (e.g., “why would you want to live a long life?” and “how do you want to go to the gym regularly?”). This procedure was repeated four times for two different target goals (“maintain and improve health” and “dress well”).

Participants then read a scenario about a college student who was caught stealing a video game, purportedly for another study. In the low-perpetrator status condition, the student was described as poor, needing to work his way through college and scarcely being able to pay his monthly bills. In the high-perpetrator status condition, the student was described as living a comfortable life and being supported by both his parents and a substantial scholarship. This manipulation is in line with other manipulations of perpetrator status (e.g. Fragale et al, 2009). Apart from the description of perpetrator status, both scenarios were identical. After participants had read the scenario, we asked them to imagine they were the judge in this case and that their task was to punish the perpetrator with a fine. We asked them to indicate what they believed to be an appropriate fine (in dollars). This measure constituted our dependent variable.

3.3.2 Results

An ANOVA with construal level and transgressor status as independent variables and the fine administered by the participants as dependent variable revealed no significant construal level main effect, $F(1, 97) = .002, p = .96, \eta^2 = .00$. We found a marginally significant main effect of perpetrator status, $F(1, 97) = 3.88, p = .05, \eta^2 = .04$. Participants administered higher fines to high status perpetrators ($M = 459.14, SD = 563.93$), than to low status perpetrators ($M = 239.59, SD = 668.46$). Importantly, the analysis revealed a significant construal level by perpetrator status interaction, $F(1, 97) = 4.49, p = .04, \eta^2 = .04$. Figure 1 visually

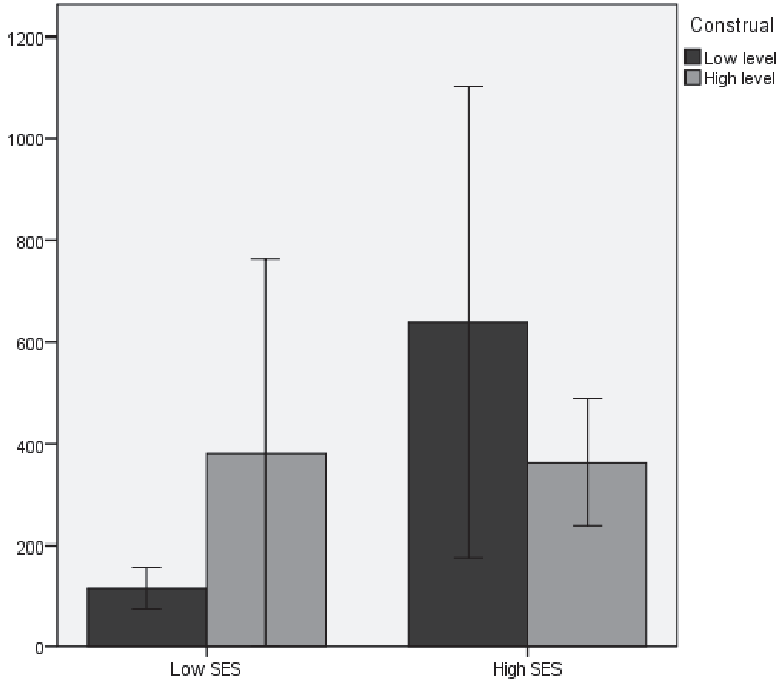
depicts this effect.

Simple effect analyses showed that in the low construal level condition low status transgressors were punished less severely ($M = 115.84$; $SD = 112.60$) than high status transgressors ($M = 639.46$, $SD = 836.53$; $F(1, 97) = 7.26$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$). In the high construal level condition low status transgressors ($M = 381.67$; $SD = 962.16$) were punished as severe as high status transgressors ($M = 362.54$, $SD = 322.63$; $F(1, 96) = .01$, $p = .90$).

In sum, in line with prior research, low status perpetrators were punished less severely than high status perpetrators (Bowles & Gelfand, 2010; Fragale et al., 2009; Kerelaia & Keck, 2011). More importantly, we showed that this effect is restricted to punishing actors in a low construal level mindset. Among punishing actors in a high construal level mindset, status of the transgressor did not influence punishment. Thus, low construal level participants incorporated perpetrator status as a factor in their punishment decisions, whereas high construal level participants did not and, consequently, displayed more consistency across situations that varied in terms of perpetrator status.⁵

⁵ As Study 3.1 was a web-based experiment, we had less control over the circumstances in which participants participated than in laboratory experiments. We thus measured the total time that participants spent working on the priming task. We reasoned that the time spent on the construal level priming procedure is a reasonable proxy for the level of attention and involvement with which participants completed the procedure. None of the effects reported as significant became insignificant nor did any of the effects change direction when we controlled for this variable.

Figure 3.2 Interaction of construal level and perpetrator status on fine awarded in Study 3. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the condition mean.



3.4 Study 3.2

Study 3.2 had two key objectives. First, in Study 3.1 we employed a scenario based design. This approach is in line with many studies in the punishment literature (e.g. Carlsmith, 2002; Darley & Pittman, 2003; Tetlock et al., 2000). To increase our confidence in the conclusions to be drawn from our research, Study 3.2 was designed to test our predictions in a context in which participants believed to be interacting with others. Specifically, in Study 3.2 participants were assigned the role of a leader whose task it was to supervise subordinates. The leader witnessed one subordinate conduct a norm transgression. Subsequently,

we measured the participant's punishing behavior (see Condon & DeSteno, 2011; Clark, Luguri, Ditto, Knobe, Shariff, & Baumeister, 2014; Kraus & Keltner, 2013; McKay, Efferson, Whitehouse, & Fehr, 2011; O'Reillys & Puffer, 1989, for similar procedures).

Second, we wanted to test if our predictions regarding the influence of situational factors on punishment behavior (as contingent upon the punishing actor's construal level mindset) generalize beyond transgressor status. In Study 3.3.2 we tested if variations in the extent to which punishing norm transgressors serves the punishing agent's self-interest influence punishment decisions as a function of the punishing actor's construal level mindset. We thus predicted that self-interest influences punishment decisions particularly among participants in a low construal level mindset (see Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Hoogervorst et al., 2010 for similar procedures). A high construal level mindset should immunize participants from the influence of self-interest.

3.4.1 Method

Participants and design. Eighty-four undergraduate business students ($M_{age} = 22.05$; $SD = 2.41$, 49 female (58.3%)) from a medium-sized European university participated in return for a payment of €5 (approximately \$6.59 at the time of the study). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions that resulted from orthogonally manipulating construal level (high vs. low) and punishment incentives (incentives vs. no incentives).

Procedure. Participants were seated in separate cubicles. All information was communicated via a computer. Upon beginning the study, participants were informed that they were randomly selected to be the supervisor of two other participants and that it would be their role to check the work of these two other participants for mistakes and to assign punishments or rewards accordingly. In reality, all communications of the two subordinates were pre-programmed. Participants then read a brief text describing their role as a supervisor. This text emphasized that supervisors were expected to uphold certain norms and rules, such as a rule against cheating. It was stated that data accuracy is very important for researchers. Supervisors were thus

to ensure that the data delivered by their subordinates reflected their actual performance and that absolutely no cheating happened.

Hereafter, we introduced the *punishment incentive manipulation*. In the incentive condition, participants were informed that if they performed exceptionally well as a supervisor, they would have an opportunity to win €50,- (approximately \$66,- at the time of the study) worth of gift vouchers. We emphasized the importance of being extra vigilant against cheaters: “Hence, if you suspect cheating, please use your power to punish and drive out cheating in laboratory studies!” In the no-incentive condition, participants also received a text motivating them to be extra vigilant against cheaters but were not offered incentives for doing so.

Next, we introduced the *construal-level manipulation*. We informed participants that their subordinates were already working on their task (a series of math problems), and asked them to participate in an additional brief study while their subordinates were busy. This other study actually contained the why/how construal level priming procedure developed by Freitas et al., (2004) that we also used in Study 3.3.1. Three participants did not follow the instructions properly and did not complete the priming procedure. We removed these participants from the dataset, leaving us with a total *N* of 81. No effect reported a significant or insignificant below changed significance level whether we include these participants or not.

Subsequently, participants ostensibly returned to the main study. They received the task results of one of their subordinates along with a message from this person that she had cheated. Specifically, the subordinate told the participant that she found an answer key next to the keyboard in their cubicle and had merely copied the answers. To make this information believable, we placed an answer key in every cubicle, ostensibly for checking the answers of the subordinates (see Dobbins, 1985; Hoogervorst et al., 2010 for similar procedures). After this, we administered our comprehension check and dependent variable. Finally, participants were fully debriefed and thanked. No one objected to the procedures followed.

Comprehension check. We disguised our comprehension check as a question asking participants to evaluate their subordinates’ performance, using a four-item forced choice scale with the options items a)

excellent, b) sufficient, c) below par and d) not applicable, this subordinate cheated (see Kim, et al., 2004 for a similar procedure).

Of participants, 67 (82.7%) indicated that their subordinates cheated; four (4.9%) evaluated the behavior as “below par”; nine (11.1%) reported the performance as “sufficient”, and one gave a rating of “excellent” (1.2%). The results for the hypotheses test did not change when we excluded this participant. We used multinomial logistic regression to check for possible effects of our manipulations using the first-answer option (“excellent”) as reference category. We found no effects of punishment incentives ($\chi^2 = 3.45, p = .33$) or construal level ($\chi^2 = 1.71, p = .63$), nor did we find evidence of an interaction effect between our experimental manipulations ($\chi^2 = 2.24, p = .52$) on the comprehension check. Results were unaffected in terms of both significance levels and direction of effects when we did not include the participants who rated the performance of the subordinate as either “sufficient” or “excellent”.

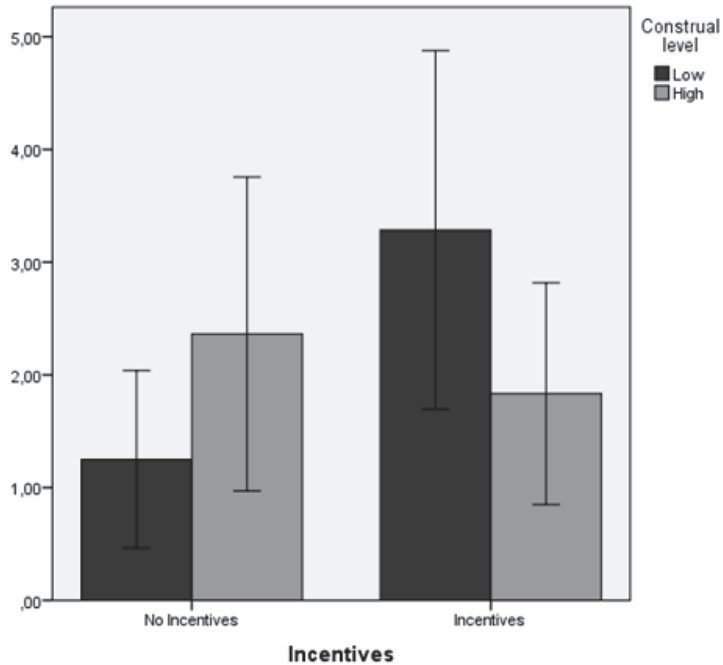
Dependent variable. We informed participants that they could, if they wished, punish their subordinate by banning him or her from participating in future paid studies in the laboratory for a number of months (from zero to ten months). We then asked participants to indicate the number of months that they banned their subordinate from participation.

3.4.2 Results

An ANOVA with construal level and punishment incentives as independent variables and the number of months for which the transgressing subordinate was banned as dependent variable revealed no significant effect of construal level ($F(1, 77) = .08, p = .78, \eta^2 = .001$) or of punishment incentives ($F(1, 77) = 1.54, p = .22, \eta^2 = .02$). However, we found a significant construal level by punishment incentives interaction ($F(1, 77) = 4.47, p = .037, \eta^2 = .06$). Figure 2 depicts this interaction. Simple effects analyses revealed that low construal level participants banned their transgressing subordinate for a significantly longer period in the incentive condition ($M = 3.29, SD = 3.49$) than in the no-incentive condition ($M = 1.25, SD = 1.68, F(1, 77) = 5.72, p = .02, \eta^2 = .07$). There was no such effect of incentives in the high construal level

condition ($M_{incentives} = 1.83$, $SD = 1.97$, $M_{no\ incentives} = 2.36$, $SD = 3.14$, $F(1, 77) = .38$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

Figure 3.3. Interaction of construal level and incentives on the number of months the transgressing follower was banned in Study 2. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the condition mean.



In sum, in line with literature, we showed that participants punished a norm transgressing subordinate more severely when they personally benefitted from this than when they did not benefit (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Hoogervorst et al., 2010). More importantly, we showed that this effect was restricted to participants in a low construal level mindset; a high construal level mindset immunized participants from the influence of self-interest. Thus, low construal level participants incorporated self-interest as a factor in their punishment decisions, whereas high construal level participants did not, consequently displaying more consistency across situations that varied in self-interest for the punishing actor.

3.5 Study 3.3

Study 3.3 was designed to address three key remaining issues. First, Study 3.1 and 3.2 revealed, respectively, support for our predictions in a vignette based design and in a more realistic situation in which participants believed they interacted with a norm transgressing subordinate. The experimental design of both studies assures high in internal validity. Yet, a key question that remains is to what extent the role of construal level in determining the influence of situational cues on punishment decisions generalizes to real world situations. Study 3.3 was therefore a survey study that assessed how organizational supervisors respond to transgressions from their subordinates.

Second, in Study 3.3.1 and 2 we varied contextual factors (i.e., transgressor status and self-interest of the punishing actor) and tested whether these contextual factors influenced punishing decisions, as a function of the punishing actor's construal level mindset. Finding effects for these contextual factors implies susceptibility of punishment decisions to such cues. Yet, in study 3 we set out to assess cross-situational consistency of punishment in a different way. Specifically, we developed a scale that directly measures cross-situational consistency in punishment. This scale is based upon existing scales from the literature on punishment of performance violations (as contingent upon the situation; see Podsakoff, Todor, Grover, & Huber, 1982; Podsakoff, Todor, Grover, & Huber, 1984). We assessed construal level from the supervisor and asked subordinates about situational differences in their supervisor's punishment of moral transgression.

Third, in Study 3.3.1 and 2 we established that a high construal level makes punishment less context dependent. In Study 3.3 we wanted to explicitly address the mediating mechanism that *explains* this effect. Specifically, we tested whether the effect of construal level of the punishing actor on cross-situational consistency of punishment is mediated by principle based moral thinking.

3.5.1 Method

Respondents and procedure. Fifty-five supervisor-subordinate dyads participated in this research. Subordinates were recruited from a research panel that is representative of the Dutch working population.

Participating subordinates received credit points that allowed them to choose certain gifts (e.g., movie tickets). Of the subordinates, 25 (45.5%) were female and 30 were male ($M_{\text{age}} = 45.78$ years, $SD = 12.21$). Subordinates had worked with their current organization for an average of 12.17 years ($SD = 10.24$) and for 8.02 years ($SD = 7.43$) in their current job. Twenty-five of the subordinates had completed higher education (45.5 %); 19 subordinates (34.5%) indicated that they had completed vocational training; 11 (20%) indicated that they had completed high school only.

Of the supervisors, 19 (34.5%) were female ($M_{\text{age}} = 47.80$ years, $SD = 10.30$). On average, supervisors had direct supervisory responsibilities for 2.75 employees ($SD = 1.70$). Supervisors had worked in their current organization for an average of 14.52 years ($SD = 10.80$) and for 9.35 years ($SD = 8.12$) in their current job.

Measures. To measure supervisors' dispositional *construal level* we used a slightly adapted version of the Behavioral Identification Form developed by Vallacher and Wegner (1989; see Fujita & Roberts, 2010 for the adapted version). This instrument is often used to assess people's dispositional level of construal (e.g., Emmons, 1992; Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004; Fujita, et al., 2006; Smith & Trope, 2006; Trope & Liberman, 2000). We asked supervisors to read fifteen descriptions of common activities (e.g., "brushing your teeth") and to indicate which of two descriptions, one low level (i.e., "moving a toothbrush through your mouth") or one high level ("preventing teeth decay"), they found most appropriate.

To assess supervisors' principle-based moral thinking style, we used Brady and Wheeler's (1996) *ethical predispositions scale* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$). This scale is a validated and non-obtrusive means of measuring preference for principled-based thinking in the moral domain (Schminke, 2001; Adler, Schminke, & Noel, 2007). For this scale, respondents are asked to indicate to what extent they value a set of character traits. Brady and Wheeler (1996) showed that high ratings on a subset of this set of traits (e.g. "honest", "trustworthy", "with integrity") reliably indicate a preference for principle-based moral thinking.

To measure the cross-situational *consistency of punitive behavior*, we developed a scale based on Podsakoff

and colleagues' contingent/non-contingent punishment scales (Podsakoff, et al., 1982; Podsakoff, et al., 1984). Although these scales stem from a similar concern with situational influences on punishment, they were developed to measure reward and punishment enactment within achievement-contexts (Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Therefore, we developed our own scale to assess cross-situational consistency in punishment of normative transgressions in the workplace using the Podsakoff and colleagues' (Podsakoff et al., 1982) scales as inspiration. Our scale contains eight items. Sample items are "my supervisor may sometimes condone normative transgressions" (reverse coded) and "even if a normative transgression may work in my supervisor's advantage, he would never condone one". Higher scores on this scale indicate *more* cross-situational consistency. (See Appendix A for the full scale.)

We pre-tested the cross-situational consistency in punishment behavior scale in a sample of employees, $N = 139$, $M_{age} = 30.9$, $SD = 9.16$, 48 females (34.5 %), recruited from AMT. An exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation indicated sufficient evidence for a one-factor solution. Only one factor had an eigenvalue above 1. This factor explained 35% of variance and all communalities exceeded .3. A confirmatory factor analysis showed that all eight items loaded significantly onto one factor and a one-factor model outperformed both a saturated model and a two-factor model (with the factors representing situational consistency and variability, respectively; $\chi^2 = 16.2$, $p = .14$, $RMSEA = .06$, $CFI = .98$, $SRMR = .04$). We thus proceeded to use this scale in our main study.

3.5.2 Results

Table 1 presents the scale means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations between the study variables.

Table 3.1. Means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities of the measures in Study 3.3

Variables	Means	SD	1	2	3
1. Supervisor construal level	2.07	1.01	(0.85)		
2. Rule-based moral thinking	3.67	0.73	0.27	(0.82)	
3. Supervisor cross- situational consistent punishing	3.31	0.88	0.47	0.38	(0.76)

Note: Reliabilities for the scales used are listed in the diagonal.

To test whether construal level is associated with consistency of punitive behavior via the mediating mechanism of the supervisor's principle-based moral thinking, we used Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro (see also Hayes, 2009; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). Table 2 displays the results. This macro conducts four analyses. First, the mediator (i.e., principle-based moral thinking) is regressed on the independent variable (i.e., dispositional construal level). This step showed a significant positive effect of construal level on principle-based moral thinking. Second, the dependent variable (i.e., cross-situational consistency of punishment) is regressed on both the mediator and the independent variable. This step showed an effect of both construal level and principle-based moral thinking on cross-situational consistency of punishment. Third, the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is estimated. This step showed an effect of construal level on the situational consistency of punishment as well. Fourth, the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable are computed. Note that whereas the analyses involved in steps 1 to 3 are based on normal distribution assumptions, step 4 (the crucial step) is non-parametric and relies on bootstrapping. We used 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals to assess significance. This step showed that the effect of construal level on situational consistency of punishment was

mediated by principle-based moral thinking.

Table 3.2 Mediation analysis in Study 3.3.

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Step 1. Mediator variable model: rule-based cognition				
Supervisor construal level	0.19	0.10	2.01*	0.07
Step 2. Dependent variable model: situational consistency of punishment				
Supervisor construal level	0.33	0.14	2.26*	0.28
Rule-based moral thinking			3.24*	
Step 3. Dependent variable model: Total effect situational consistency of punishment				
Supervisor construal level	0.40	0.11	3.83**	0.22
Step 4. Effects of supervisor construal level				
	Effect	Bootstrapped SE	95% CI lower limit	95% CI upper limit
Indirect effect	0.06	0.04	0.004	0.1745
Variable				
Direct effect	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Direct effect	0.33	.11	3.10	0.003

3.6 Discussion

We investigated what kind of factors drives punitive decisions: situational influences, on the one hand, and cross-situational stable drivers, specifically moral principles, on the other. We identified the punishing actor's construal level mindset as an important, if not crucial, moderator here: high construal level allows for a stronger influence of moral principles and is thus associated with cross-situational consistent punishment. Low construal level, in contrast, facilitates an influence of situational variations and is thus associated with less cross-situational consistency in punishment. We provided evidence for these arguments in two ways. In Study 3.1, a web-based experiment, and Study 3.2, a laboratory experiment, we manipulated specific situational factors (perpetrator status and punishment incentives, respectively) and investigated whether these influenced punitive decisions. Results showed an effect of these factors on punishment decisions, but only for low construal level; high construal level punishers were not affected by these situational factors. In Study 3.3, a field study, we measured chronic individual differences in construal level, a preference for principle-based moral thinking, and the situational consistency of punitive decision-making and showed that the effect of construal level on whether or not supervisors punish consistently across situations or not is mediated by principle-based moral thinking.

3.6.1 Implications

This research has relevant implications for the literature on the punishment of norm transgressions (see Darley, 2009 for an overview). While several studies have made clear that punitive decisions can be driven by situational influences (Goldberg, et al., 1999; Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007; Van Prooijen, 2006), even up to factors as seemingly inconsequential as the time of day (Danziger et al., 2011a;b), others have shown a remarkable insensitivity to the situation and a predominant influence of moral drivers (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002; Folger & Skarlicki, 2008; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). As far as we know, however, no previous research has investigated what factors determine whether the influence of situational or non-situational factors is dominant. This is all the more remarkable, as in adjacent disciplines precisely this

question has been hotly debated (Danziger et al., 2011a;b; Gromet & Darley, 2006). Even if this were not the case, however, we would suggest that investigating the susceptibility of punishment to situational influences is important from a purely psychological standpoint: to arrive a *full* understanding of this important type of behavior it is of crucial important to take note of the way that punitive decisions are made under specific circumstances. Classifying different drivers on the basis of their situational fleetingness or stability helps with this important task. This allowed us to relate punitive decision-making to punishing actor's construal level mindset, which we described as the cognitive pendant of situational sensitivity or insensitivity. At the very least, thus, one implication of this research is that to understand how punishment decisions are shaped by situational factors or moral norms and principles, it is crucial to take the punishing actor's cognition into account (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010; Guthrie, et al., 2007).

As such, we provide a framework to understand why and when punishment decisions are or are not shaped by situational influences. One of the more ironic consequences of this framework is that whether or not punitive decisions are driven by situational influences is, in itself, also subject to situational factors. For example, construal level has been shown to be tightly related to psychological distance (e.g. temporal, spatial and social distance as well as distance from reality ['hypotheticality'] Trope & Liberman, 2010) in such a way that large distances are likely to engender high levels of construal and small distances relatively low levels of construal. Whether or not situational influences play into punishment decisions, thus, likely depends on levels of psychological distance between punishing actor and perpetrator. Other antecedents that have been shown to be related to construal level are sense of power (high sense of power is likely to be associated with high levels of construal; Smith & Trope, 2006) and positive and negative affect (positive affect is associated with high, and negative with low, level construal; Watkins, Moberly, & Mould, 2008). More in general, construal level theory and the framework we introduce above thus provide a way to understand how these and other factors may influence the cross-situational consistency of punitive decisions.

This research also has implications for the construal level literature. Thus far, construal level has

largely been studied within the cognitive or intrapersonal domain (see Burgoon, et al., 2013 and Trope & Liberman, 2010 for recent overviews). However, our research shows that construal level also has important implications for interpersonal interactions. Particularly interesting, in this respect, is the fact that we conceptualized construal level as the cognitive pendant of situational sensitivity, in line with extant research (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012; Ledgerwood, Trope & Chaiken, 2010). Fundamentally, thus, we provide converging evidence that high construal level helps people in evaluative and judgment situations to isolate themselves from the otherwise dominating influences of the situation (e.g., Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). This is particularly important in the interpersonal domain since interpersonal behaviors, both desirable (e.g. pro-social behaviors) and undesirable (anti-social behaviors) may be driven both by situationally invariant factors, such as moral norms or principles (De Groot, & Steg, 2009) as well as fleeting situational cues (Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004). Our research thus reasonably implies that high construal level will facilitate the influence of the former of these drivers, while attenuating the influence of the latter, whereas low construal level will have the opposite effect. Hence, in this way, this research underscores, on the one hand, that construal level theory provides a framework to understand the relative influence of both these types of drivers of behavior in a variety of contexts and, on the other, that meaningful predictions can be derived from construal level theory for the interpersonal domain, thereby extending the scope of theory.

From an applied point of view, perhaps the most interesting implication of our research is that we show that whether or not situational, fleeting, influences drive punitive decisions is determined by the punishing actor's cognition (construal level). As we have noted, in several adjacent literature both the desirability and normativity of situationally consistent punishment (Gromet & Darley, 2006) as well as the likelihood (Danziger et al., 2011a) have been extensively discussed. Of course, our results do not allow us to speak towards the former of these concerns, but we do, at least, show that situational influences may indeed mater, but only under specific circumstances (i.e. punisher low construal level). Hence, especially interesting in this context may be implications derived from certain known antecedents of construal level, such as

psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). For instance, punishing actors should be aware that their punishment decisions are likely to be more strongly driven by situationally idiosyncratic elements when (psychological) distance to the perpetrator is low (likely leading to lower levels of construal).

3.6.2 Suggestions for future research, strengths and limitations.

We believe one of the most pressing issues in punishment research is the issue whether, or rather under which circumstances, cross-situational consistency or situational flexibility of punishment is ‘better’, both in terms effectively preventing future misconduct as well as ensuring a sense of (societal) fairness. Research shows that punishment of normative transgressions is highly important for the efficient functioning of social collectives (Boyd & Richerson, 1992; Fehr & Gächter, 2000). Within organizational contexts, for instance, organization members have been shown to want normative transgressions to be punished as a matter of principle (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Folger & Skarlicki, 2008). In addition, unaddressed moral transgressions may lead to a spread of misbehavior throughout the organization by means of habituation (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998) and by negatively affecting the ethical climate of such organizations (Peterson, 2002). Yet, this does not imply that cross-situational consistency is necessarily ‘better’ for an organization (e.g. in terms of organizational efficiency and fairness) or for society. There are reasons to believe that a certain amount of situational flexibility might actually be more beneficial for the functioning social collectives. First, Podsakoff et al. (1984) show that what they call ‘contingent’ punishment and reward (i.e. punishment and reward conditional upon performance) leads to higher performance. Second, it has been argued that a punishment strategy that is sensitive to situational contingencies is more successful to decrease future repeated deviance (Cusson, 1993). Hence, in society as well as in organizations the need for consistency and predictability in punishment most likely needs to be balanced with the need for some form of flexibility to achieve optimal results. Our results do not allow us to address this important question, but we believe they offer a starting point for research that does.

In relation to this, especially needed is more research in the punishment domain that focuses on

actual punishing actors, such as judges and organizational managers, to address this and other questions. Much extant research has solely based itself on experimental designs, often making use of undergraduate students and vignettes (e.g. Carlsmith, 2002; Condon & DeSteno, 2011; Van Prooijen, 2006). Notwithstanding the great value of the previous research efforts, we believe it to be worthwhile to study actual punitive decision makers as their motivations and interests may potentially differ substantially from the average student population. A major strength of this chapter is therefore that that we tested our hypotheses by employing various research methodologies, including a laboratory experiment (Study 3.1), a web-based experiment using adults (Study 3.2) and a field study (Study 3.3). In this way, we believe that we were able to accommodate the limitation of one type of methodology by complementing it with the use of another. For instance, one limitation of experimental research is its weak external and ecological validity, and employing samples of undergraduate students strengthen these effects. However, experimental research allows for causal inferences that cannot be drawn from the correlational designs (e.g., Brown & Lord, 1999; Jung & Avolio, 2000). Thus, by complementing our data from carefully controlled experimental research designs with multi-source organizational field data and web-based experimental data, we hope to have addressed the weaknesses of the various data collection strategies, while building on their collective strengths.

3.7 Conclusion

Billy Budd ends with Captain Vere being fatally wounded in naval action against a French warship. His last words are “Billy Budd, Billy Budd”, perhaps an ironic commentary by Melville on the character’s need to preserve and uphold the law no matter the circumstances. The main purpose of the current research was not to show that punishment, in fact, can or is influenced by situational influences. Rather, we wanted to show that whether or not punishment is driven by situationally invariant, moral rules or principles, or fleeting situation cues, is dependent upon deeper-level psychological variables, particularly construal level. Realizing that may be a first step toward punitive judgments and behaviors that are neither (almost) completely

determined by situational cues and affordances without any connection to our moral rules or principles nor mindlessly issued based on (moral) principles without any regard for situational circumstances.

Chapter 4. Getting it Done and Getting it Right: Leader Disciplinary Reactions to Follower Transgressions are Determined by Leader Construal Level Mindset

During the Italy vs Uruguay match at the 2014 football world cup in Brazil, Uruguayan star striker Luis Suárez bit his opponent, the Italian defender Giorgio Chiellini, in the shoulder (BBC.co.uk, June 25 2014). Asked about the event a few hours later, the Uruguayan manager Óscar Tabárez commented “this is a football world cup, not about morality” (New York Times, June 24 2014). In the United Kingdom journalists were allowed to hack into voicemails of many celebrities, including members of the Royal Family, for many years unhindered (The Guardian, July 8 2009). Over several decades, Pennsylvania State University’s officials – including longstanding head coach of the football team Joe Paterno – helped cover up university football coach Jerry Sandusky’s repeated sexual assaults of underage boys (The Patriot-News, March 31 2011).

These are just a few examples of high profile cases in which leaders neglected to take disciplinary action in response to followers’ moral transgressions. But why? Based on the examples above, one obvious answer is that leaders may foresee having to deal with negative consequences of using discipline. Losing one’s star striker significantly reduces one’s chances in any soccer tournament. Phone hacking may be wrong, but it helped selling chapters. This suggests that whether a leader uses discipline in response to followers’ moral transgressions depends on what motivates a leader most strongly: his or her sense of moral obligation, or reaching certain more practical aims (e.g. winning the next match, selling chapters).

In this chapter we focus on these antecedents of leader’s disciplinary responses to moral transgressions. Our analysis builds on construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Construal level theory notes that stimuli can be mentally represented either in relatively abstract or relatively concrete ways. We argue that the motivational pull of a leader’s sense of moral obligation versus more practical concerns depends on his or her level of cognitive abstraction (i.e. construal level). High (abstract) construal level facilitates a focus on moral rules and norms (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). In contrast, low (concrete) construal level implies a focus on the needs and affordances of the current situation (Liberman, & Trope, 2008). Based on this, we will argue

that leaders in a high construal level mindset are likely to respond in a disciplinary manner to followers' moral transgressions. In contrast, leaders in a low construal level mindset are not simply disinterested in disciplinary action, but may actively avoid discipline in response to moral transgressions.

In other words, low construal level is associated with leaders neglecting to take disciplinary measures in response to follower moral transgressions. This implies that leaders may fail to enact discipline, even if they themselves or the organization that they represent do not benefit from such transgressions. In this way our analysis extends beyond a simple dichotomy between morality (disciplining moral transgressions) and self-interest (e.g., winning the next match, or selling chapters in the examples given above; Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010). A focus on practical concerns makes the enforcement of moral norms be viewed as obstacles to the achievement of practical aims.

4.1 Theoretical background

4.1.1 Getting it right vs getting it done. It is increasingly recognized that the job of organizational leaders involves more than motivating followers towards optimal performance (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Leaders also have moral obligations, such as setting the right example and treating followers in a fair and just manner (Brown, & Treviño, 2006; Van Houwelingen, Van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2014). These moral obligations follow from a normative perspective (Gini, 1997), but they also have pragmatic justification. Ethical leadership has been shown to be associated with desirable follower outcomes, such as extra-role behaviors and employee satisfaction (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011; Toor, & Ofori, 2009). However, leader behaviors mandated by one goal (e.g. inspiring optimal follower performance) may not always perfectly align with the other goal (e.g. safeguarding the moral climate of the organization). Administering discipline in response to followers' moral transgressions is such a case. On the one hand, using discipline in such a situation is clearly morally mandated. On the other hand, the use of discipline may negatively affect the follower's motivation or performance. A leader may also experience the need to administer discipline as distracting and unpleasant (Treviño, 1992). Finally, enacting discipline takes up time and energy that could

have been used to reach certain targets. How do leaders manage such conflicts between their moral responsibilities and practical concerns?

We argue that much depends on what is on the front of the leader's mind when he or she is confronted with follower misbehavior. A leader who is strongly motivated to do 'the right thing' is more likely to enact discipline, even if it is unpleasant and distracting. Leaders who are focused on getting their job done (i.e. motivated to reach certain practical aims) are more likely to actively avoid taking disciplinary action in response to moral transgressions. In other words: whether or not a leader will respond in a disciplinary manner to followers' moral transgressions depends on the motivational push or pull of two opposing forces. A sense of moral obligation pushes a leader towards enacting discipline. Practical goals, on the other hand, push leaders away from enacting discipline.

Below we argue that the fundamental psychological process that determines the motivational force of moral obligations versus practical aims is the leader's construal level mindset.

4.1.2 Construal level and leader discipline. Most stimuli can be mentally represented in one of two ways: either relatively abstract or relatively concrete (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). We can for instance think of an organization as a unified whole (abstract), or in terms of all individual organizational members (concrete; Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002). In construal level theory, an abstract mental representation is called a high construal level; a concrete representation is called low construal level. High construal levels usually include only gist-like and generalized information. Low construal levels include more, and more detailed information (Burgoon, Henderson, & Markman, 2013). It has been shown that construal level can be situationally induced (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). For instance, objects placed at relatively large distance are typically construed on higher levels of construal (Burgoon et al., 2013). Yet, construal level is also a stable dispositional variable. Some people are chronically more likely to construe stimuli on a high level whereas

others are more likely to construe stimuli on a low level (Trope, & Liberman, 2010; Vallacher, & Wegner, 1989).

High construal level allows for ‘mental travel’ (Liberman, & Trope, 2008). As high (compared to low) construal level needs less details, it is easier to imagine events or stimuli that are far removed from us in time or space. Put differently, high construal level implies a ‘step back’ from our immediate context. By disengaging from the details that make up the current situation and keeping only the essential bits of information we are able to imagine ourselves in different situations and context. Because of this disengagement from the ‘here’ and ‘now’, situational details have less of an influence on judgment and behavior under high construal level (Burgoon, et al., 2013). As an illustration of this effect, high construal level makes people immune for incidental third party opinions on contentious matters (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010).

Since high construal level facilitates disengagement from the immediate situation, it allows one to focus on what is desirable (Liberman & Trope, 1998). In contrast, low construal level helps to focus on what is feasible. This is because obstacles typically loom larger under low construal level. Obstacles and impediments to what we want are often concrete and situational (Marguc, Förster, & Van Kleef, 2011): there are often many roads to the same destination, but obstacles are usually unique to the specific road we are on. In sum, high construal level facilitates a focus on what should be done. Low construal level, in contrast, facilitates a focus on what can be done now (Kivetz, & Tyler, 2007).

Moral norms and principles determine what it is that should be done. Moral norms also tend to be cross-situationally valid, and are therefore relatively abstract. High construal level allows one to disengage from the immediate context. This allows one to focus more strongly on cross-situationally valid information, such as moral norms. All this makes that moral norms and principles have a stronger influence on decision making and behavior under high, rather than low, construal level (see Eyal, et al., 2008). This leads us to

expect that leaders in a high construal level mindset will respond with relatively strong disciplinary measures to moral transgressions committed by employees. This argument culminates in Hypothesis 4.1:

A high construal level mindset makes leaders respond with discipline to followers' moral transgressions.

Research is largely silent as regards to how low construal level relates to moral norms. Extrapolating from the reasoning above, we suggest that this relation is likely to be negative. Moral norms often stand in the way of making use of all the opportunities in the situation. For example, it is feasible (and, in fact, often profitable) to make use of illegally obtained information, but it is not morally desirable. A leader who is mainly motivated by making the most out of the current situation may therefore experience moral norms and rules as frustrating impediments to reaching situational goals. Thus, a leader in a low construal level mindset may actively avoid enacting discipline in response to a moral transgression. This argument culminates in Hypothesis 4.2:

A low construal level mindset makes leaders actively avoid discipline in response to followers' moral transgressions.

4.2 Integration of Arguments and Overview of Studies

In sum, we argue that whether a leader uses discipline in response to followers' moral transgressions – or actively refrains from doing so – depends on what motivates him/her most strongly: his or her sense of moral obligation or reaching certain practical aims. Because a high construal level mindset involves a positive evaluation of moral norms as guides for behavior, we argue that leaders in such a mindset are strongly motivated to respond in disciplinary ways to moral transgressions committed by followers. In contrast, a low construal level mindset likely results in moral norms being viewed as obstacles to reaching practical goals. Therefore, we expect leaders in such a mindset to avoid the use of use of discipline in response to followers' moral transgressions.

To test these two unique predictions regarding the role of construal level in motivating leaders to use discipline –versus avoid using it –we compared leader’s disciplinary responses to moral transgressions with their responses to transgressions that are not considered moral in nature. To do so we compared disciplinary responses to intentional versus unintentional follower transgressions. Only intentional transgressions are viewed as moral transgressions (Malle, & Nelson, 2003). Unintentional transgressions are usually discounted as simple mishaps that arouse no special interest in punishment or discipline (Knobe, 2003). Importantly the same transgressions may be displayed either intentionally or unintentionally (Leunissen, De Cremer, Reinders Folmer, & Van Dijke, 2013; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, & Uchiyama, 2008).

In this chapter, unintentional follower transgressions thus essentially function as a baseline case. In other words: we use unintentional transgressions to determine whether construal level makes a leader less or more inclined to enact disciplinary measures in response to follower moral transgressions. Moral rules and norms appear to a leader in a low level construal mindset as obstacles and impediments. He or she is therefore less likely to enforce them. This should be especially pronounced when a follower actually transgressed a moral norm. That is: when the follower transgressed intentionally. High construal level makes the use of discipline in response to follower moral (i.e. intentional) transgression more likely. Hence, if this holds true, there should be no difference between leader high and low construal level mindset for unintentional follower transgressions. At the same time, there should be a pronounced difference in the enactment of disciplinary measures for intentional follower transgressions.

We tested our argument in two laboratory experiments and a field study among organizational leaders. In Studies 4.1 and 4.2, both laboratory experiments, we assigned participants to a mid-level management position in a simulated company. In both studies we used in-basket exercises, a popular tool to assess managerial behavior (e.g. Meyer, 1970; Whetzel, Rotenbury, & McDaniel, 2014) and had the leader respond to employee misconduct (see Hoogervorst, et al., 2010 for a similar procedure). We manipulated the

intentionality of the transgression (Leunissen et al., 2013; Struthers et al., 2008) and construal level of the leader (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004; McCrea, Wieber, & Myers, 2012) using well validated procedures.

In Study 4.3, we recruited organizational leaders. To increase methodological diversity, we measured chronic individual differences in construal level in this study (Vallacher, & Wegner, 1989). We had the leaders recall and describe an instance of intentional versus unintentional employee misconduct (see Leunissen et al., 2013 for a similar procedure) and asked them about their disciplinary actions in the described situation.

As noted earlier, our analysis of leader discipline of moral transgressions in terms of construal level theory extends beyond the dichotomy between morality versus the interests of the leader or the organization that (s)he represents. This implies that leaders in a low construal level mindset may neglect using discipline in response to moral transgressions even if they themselves or the organization that they represent do not gain from such transgressions. To explicitly test this, we included situations in which the leader benefitted from followers' moral transgressions (Study 4.1) as well as situations in which such transgressions did not benefit the leader or the organization (Studies 4.2 and 4.3).

4.3 Study 4.1

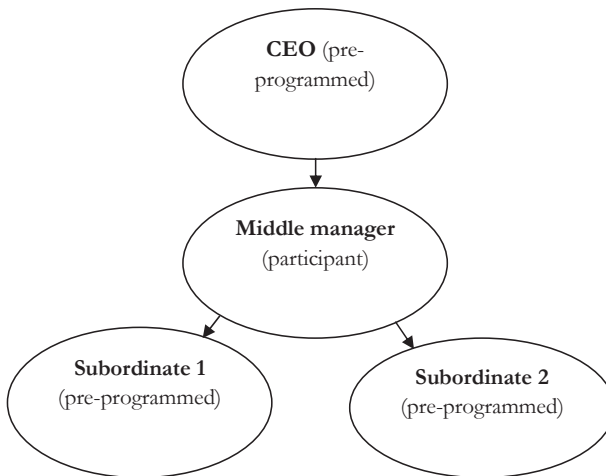
4.3.1 Method

Participants and design. One-hundred and seventeen undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 20.82$, $SD = 1.83$; 41 women) participated in this study for partial fulfillment of course credit. They were randomly assigned to a 2 (transgression type; intentional vs. unintentional transgression) X 2 (construal level; high vs. low) between subjects factorial design.

Procedure. We used an in-basket exercise in this study. In-basket exercises are popular ways to assess job performance (Whetzel, et al., 2014) and have been used extensively in leadership experiments (Hoogervorst, et al., 2012). We told participants that they would be involved in testing a new assessment tool

stimulating an actual work-environment. More specifically, participants were assigned to a mid-level management position in an advertisement company that consisted, including the participant, of four people: one boss ('the CEO', placed above the participant in the hierarchy), one middle level manager (the participant), and two employees (responsible to the participant; see also Figure 1). Participants were informed that they would receive some messages from other participants and that their task was to respond to these messages. We told them that their responses would be assessed and that they would receive an assessment of their managerial skills at the end of the study, as an extra incentive. We further informed participants that they would be working with their subordinates on developing a slogan for a new marketing campaign, which, in case of satisfactory performance could earn them up to € 10 (approximately \$ 14 at the time of the study). Subordinates were supposed to share any work they did with their supervisor (the participant), but they could also submit work to the experimenter by themselves, in which case the team and the participant would not share in the potential bonus. We emphasized that as mid-level managers, it was the participant's task to evaluate the quality of the subordinates' work and to report any irregularities or mishaps to the CEO.

Figure 4.1 Hierarchical set-up used in Studies 1 and 2. Arrows denote hierarchical relationships.



While participants were waiting for their first message, we asked them to engage in a short exercise, which constituted the construal level manipulation, although we presented it as a “mind focusing exercise”. To prime either a *high* or *low construal level mindset* we used the “why/how” priming procedure developed by Freitas and colleagues (2004). Participants were invited to ponder either ‘why-questions’ (to induce a focus on higher order goals of action, i.e. a high construal level mindset) or ‘how-questions’ (to induce a focus on the subordinate means by which actions are accomplished, i.e. a low construal level mindset) when they would perform a certain activity (e.g. “why/how do you want to maintain and improve your health). This procedure was repeated eight times in each condition, once with ‘maintain and improve your health’ as target, and once with ‘dress well’ as target. This is a well-validated procedure to prime construal level that has been widely tested and used already all across the literature (see e.g., Freitas, et al., 2001; Freitas et al., 2004; Fujita & Roberts, 2010; Malkocet al., 2010; Torelli & Kaikati, 2009, for examples).

Immediately after completion of this procedure, participants received a message from one of their employees informing them that they had submitted some work themselves and, because of that, had received € 7.50 (approx. \$ 10.50 at the time of the study). In the *intentional transgression condition* the employee made clear that he or she did so because (s)he did not want to share any proceeds with anyone else and had thus deliberately chosen to bypass the participant. In the *unintentional transgression condition*, however, the employee said to have had clicked the wrong button and had actually intended to send the work to the participant. In both cases we made sure the participants understood that their subordinate had in fact received money and that they would not be able to recover that money (see e.g. Kim et al., 2004, Struthers et al., 2008, for similar procedures). Directly after this, we assessed the dependent variable and after that our manipulation checks (to prevent contamination). Finally, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation. None of the participants objected to the procedures used.

Manipulation checks. To test whether the manipulation of intentionality was successful we asked participants to indicate to what extent they thought the transgressing employee (1) acted out of bad faith, (2) his or her behavior was based on a misunderstanding (reverse coded) and (3) put his or her self-interest above that of the team (all three items measured on a 7-point Likert scale; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much so*). These three items were collapsed into one reliable perceived intentional versus unintentional transgression scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$), with higher scores indicating more perceived intentionality (see Fragale, et al., 2009, for a similar procedure).

Dependent variable. As dependent variable we asked participants to indicate whether they were willing to report the behavior of the transgressing employee to the CEO (i.e., their own boss; 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much so*).

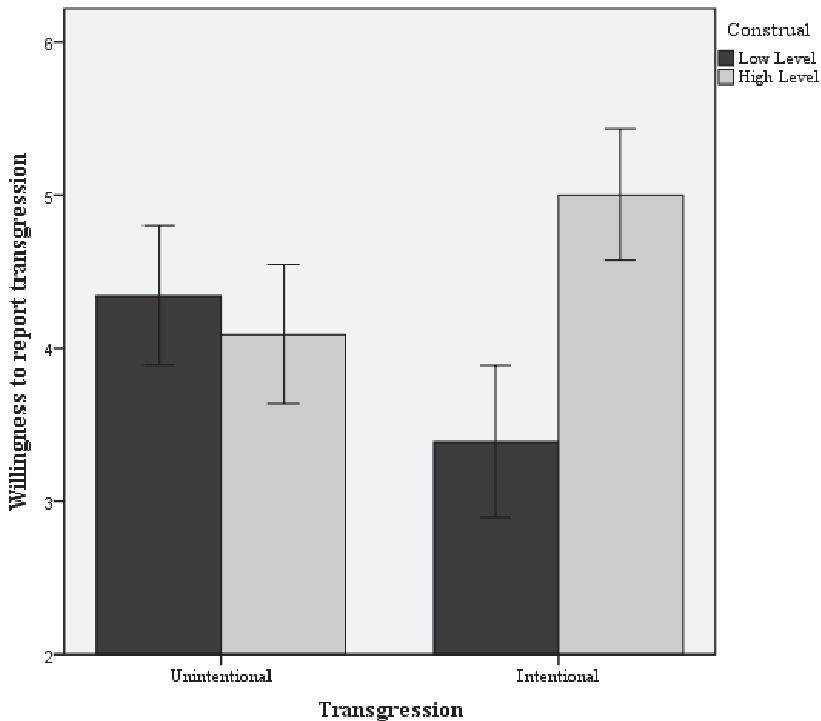
4.3.2 Results

Manipulation check. ANOVA with construal level mindset and transgression type as independent variables and our three-item manipulation check-scale revealed a significant main effect for transgression type, $F(1,113) = 6.85, p < .01$. Participants in the intentional transgression condition were significantly more likely to indicate that the transgression was committed intentionally, $M = 4.54, SD = .75$, than participants in the unintentional transgression condition, $M = 4.15, SD = .87$. There was no main effect of construal level, $p = .25$, nor an interaction between the two factors, $p = .26$. This indicates that our manipulation was successful.

Hypotheses test. ANOVA with construal level and transgression type as independent variables and willingness to report the transgressing employee to the CEO as dependent variable revealed the expected construal level by transgression type interaction, $F(1,113) = 9.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$. Figure 2 visually represents the interaction. In line with Hypothesis 1, subsequent simple effects analyses revealed that high construal level leaders were more likely to report the transgressing employee after an intentional than after an

unintentional transgression, $M_{intentional} = 5.00$, $SD = 1.59$, $M_{unintentional} = 4.09$, $SD = 1.76$, $F(1,113) = 4.27$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .04$. In contrast, and in line with Hypothesis 2, low construal level leaders were more likely to report the transgressing employee after an unintentional than after an intentional transgression, $M_{intentional} = 3.39$, $SD = 1.59$, $M_{unintentional} = 4.34$, $SD = 1.63$, $F(1, 113) = 4.93$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$. We did not find a significant main effect for transgression type ($F < 1$, $p > .95$). We did, however, find a significant main effect for construal level, $F(1,113) = 4.80$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$, such that high construal level leaders were in general more likely to report the transgressing employee to the CEO, $M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.75$, than low construal level leaders, $M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.67$.

Figure 4.2 Effect of construal level mindset and transgression on willingness to report the behavior to a higher-level authority in Study 4.1. Error bars represent standard errors.



4.4 Study 4.2

In Study 4.2, we aimed to replicate the findings of Study 4.1 and extend these findings by giving leaders a chance to actually reward (as well as discipline) transgressing followers. In addition, we employed a different procedure to prime construal level mindset than the one we used in Study 4.1. We did this to show that the effects of the construal level prime that we used did not result from characteristics specific to the Freitas et al. (2004) priming procedure used in study 1.

4.4.1 Method

Participants. One-hundred and twenty-six undergraduate students, $M_{age} = 21.00$; $SD_{age} = 2.04$; 45 women (35.7 %), participated in return for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to a 2 (transgression type: intentional vs. unintentional) X 2 (construal level: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure. We used essentially the same procedures as in Study 4.1. We again used an in-basket exercise in which the participants were assigned to a mid-level management role. However, instead of using the why/how priming procedure developed by Freitas and colleagues (2004), we now used a procedure developed by Lin, Murphy & Shoben (1997) to prime construal level mindset. Participants were presented with four sets of objects, which were held constant across conditions. One of the sets, for instance, consisted of a T-shirt, a high-heel shoe, a sandal, and a pair of jeans; another consisted of a Dalmatian (i.e. a breed of dogs), a goldfish, a German shepherd, and a hawk. Participants in the high construal level condition were asked to generate functions, uses, materials and physical characteristics that were *common* to all four objects in each set. Participants in the low construal level condition, in contrast, were asked to come up with functions, uses, materials and physical characteristics that were *different* for all four objects in each set. Focusing on communalities induces a focus on overarching categories and thus a high construal level mindset, while a

focus on differences induces a focus on lower level categories and, hence, a low construal level mindset (Lin et al., 1997).

We manipulated transgression type in the same manner as in Study 4.1: participants received a message explaining that one of their employees had either intentionally or unintentionally received money that should have gone to the team. At the end of the study we assessed the dependent variables: we informed participants that their team as a whole had received another bonus, to be divided among the team members at the participants' discretion. We then asked participants to indicate whether they would share part of this bonus with the transgressing employee. Whether or not participants chose to share with their transgressing employee constituted our first dependent variable. Secondly, if they chose to share, we asked how much of the bonus they would allocate to their transgressing subordinate. This constituted our second dependent variable. Finally, we fully debriefed the participants, thanked them and send them home. None of the participants objected to the procedures used.

Manipulation checks. As the Lin et al. (1998) procedure is a less well-established construal level mindset prime than the Freitas et al. (2004) one used in Study 4.1, we followed the procedures set out by Fujita and Roberts (2010) to check for the effectiveness of this priming procedure. Specifically, we used a modified version of the Behavioral Identification Form ('BIF'; Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) as manipulation check. For each of ten different activities participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale which of two possible descriptions they preferred for a given activity (e.g. "cleaning the house"), one referring to the (concrete, low level) means to describe the activity (e.g. "vacuuming the floor"), the other indicating (abstract, high level) superordinate goal of the activity (e.g. "showing one's cleanliness"). We collapsed these ten items into a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

We assessed the success of our transgression-type manipulation with two forced choice questions (yes or no): (1) ‘Do you think your subordinate did this intentionally?’, and (2) ‘Do you think your subordinate intended to follow proper procedure?’ (see Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994, for a similar procedure).

Dependent variables. We asked participants (a) whether they would share part of the bonus with their transgressing follower, or would rather withhold payment and (b) if they were prepared to do so, how much they would pay him or her.

4.4.2 Results

Manipulation checks. ANOVA with construal level and transgression type as independent variables and the BIF as dependent variable revealed a main effect of construal level, $F(1, 122) = 4.84, p = .03, \eta^2 = .04$. Participants in the high construal level condition were more likely to prefer the high-order, more abstract, descriptions of the given activities, $M = 5.37, SD = .98$, relative to participants in the low construal level mindset condition, $M = 4.92, SD = 1.21$. There was no significant main effect of transgression type, $F < 1, p = .69$, nor a significant construal level x transgression type interaction effect, $F = 1.39, p = .24$. This indicates that the construal level priming procedure was successful.

We used logistic regression to analyze the two binary manipulation checks for the transgression type manipulation. We included both experimental conditions as well as the interaction between the two as independent variables in our model. The full model for the question whether participants believed their employee’s transgression was intentional was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 126) = 57.24, p < 0.001$. This model revealed a significant main effect for transgression type, $B = -2.97, SE = .68, Wald(1) = 19.38, p < 0.001, Odds\ ratio = .05, 95\% CI\ for\ Odds\ Ration\ [.01, .19]$, but no significant effects for construal level, $B = .12, p = .84$, or the interaction term, $B = -.41, p = .68$. In the intentional transgression condition, 88.1 per cent of participants agreed that their employee transgressed intentionally; in the unintentional condition only 23.9 per cent did so.

The full model was also significant for the second manipulation check, assessing whether participants believed the employee intended to follow proper procedures $\chi^2(2, N = 126) = 48.69, p < 0.001$. As before, we found a significant main effect for transgression type, $B = -2.52, SE = .65, Wald(1) = 14.58, p < 0.001, Odds\ ratio: .08, 95\% CI\ for\ Odds\ Ratio\ [.02, .29]$, but no significant effects for construal level, $B = -.09, p = .87$, or the interaction term, $B = -.11, p = .91$. In the intentional transgression condition 89.8 percent of participants thought the employee had intentionally not followed proper procedures; in the unintentional transgression condition only 31.3 per cent of participants thought so. Taken together, these analyses indicate that the manipulation of transgression type was successful.

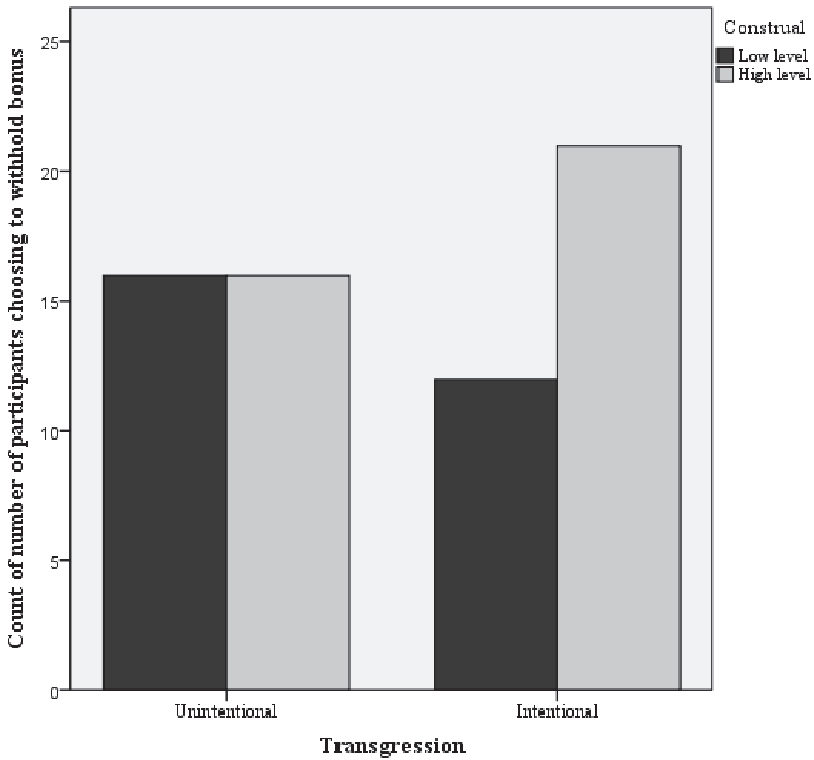
Hypotheses tests. Our first dependent variable was whether our participants chose to share part of the team bonus with their transgressing employee. In total 62 out of 1191⁶ participants said they would do so. To test our hypotheses, we used logistic regression with the main effects of the experimental manipulations and the interaction between the two manipulations as predictors. The full model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 119) = 7.85, p = .045$. Furthermore, the difference in χ^2 values between the model with and the model without interaction term was itself significant ($p = .04$), which indicates a significant omnibus interaction effect (Jaccard, 2001).

The analysis revealed a significant interaction between construal level and transgression type, $B = 2.05, SE = .79, Wald(1) = 6.82, p = .01, Odds\ ratio: 7.77, 95\% CI\ for\ Odds\ Ratio: [1.67, 36.24]$. Figure 3 depicts this effect. Supporting Hypothesis 1, in the high construal level condition more participants shared their bonus with employees who transgressed unintentionally (57.6 %) than with employees who transgressed intentionally (32.1 %); $Odds\ Ratio: .47, 95\% CI\ for\ Odds\ Ratio: [.16, 1.38]$. Conversely, and in support of Hypothesis 2, in the low construal level conditions, less participants shared their bonus with employees who

⁶ 7 participants had to be excluded from this analysis due to missing data.

transgressed unintentionally (44.1 %) than with employees who transgressed intentionally (55.9 %), *Odds Ratio*: 2.86, 95 % CI for Odds Ratio: [1.00, 8.20]. We did not find significant main effects for either construal level ($p = .55$), nor for intentionality ($p = .17$).

Figure 4.3 Number of participants withholding bonus per condition in Study 4.2.



Subsequently, we tested whether the interaction pattern that we found above would also emerge for the amount of money (in cents) that leaders shared with their transgressing subordinate. In other words: we

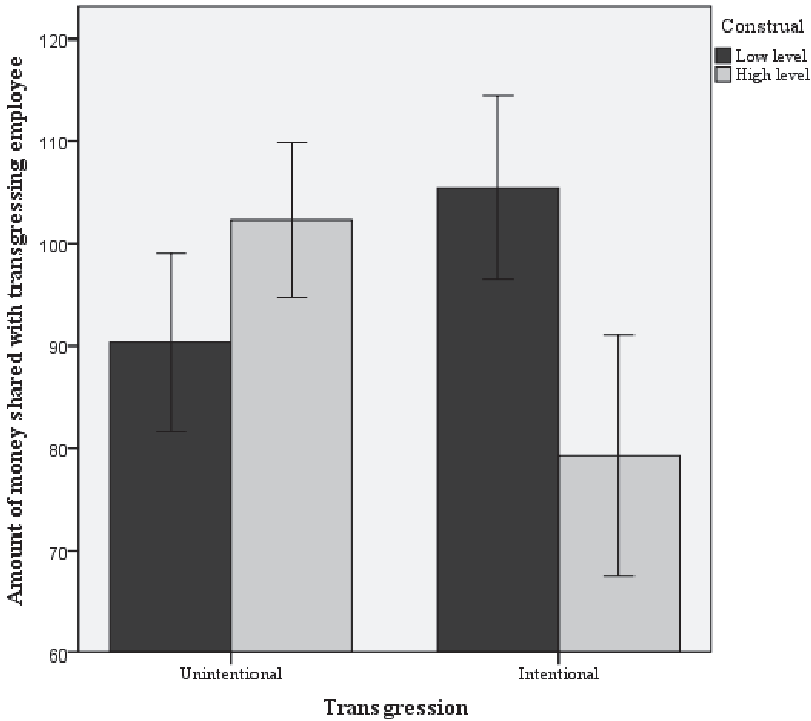
expected leaders with a high construal level mindset to share less money with their subordinate after an intentional transgression than after an unintentional one, while the reverse should be true for leaders with a low construal level mindset. This variable is characterized by a truncated distribution (i.e. a distribution clustered on a limiting value, in this case zero; McDonald and Moffit, 1980). Hence, we used tobit regression analysis to analyze this data (Tobin, 1958). Tobit regression uses all the observations of a truncated distributed dataset to estimate a regression line, rather than just the observation with a value above the limiting value, and is therefore preferred when analyzing truncated distributed dependent variables over other techniques that use only the values above (or below) the limiting value (such as traditional OLS-regression analyses of truncated distributions; Baba, 1990; Leigh, 1985).

This analysis revealed a significant main effect of transgression type, $\beta = -123.36$, $SE = 50.81$, $p = .02$, such that less money was shared with the transgressing subordinate after an intentional, rather than an unintentional, transgression. This main effect of transgression type was qualified by a significant interaction between construal level and transgression type, $\beta = 188.05$, $SE = 68.34$, $p < .001$. Figure 4 visually depicts this interaction effect. On average, participants in the high construal level condition shared more money with a subordinate who transgressed unintentionally, $M = 94.97$, $SD = 92.71$ ⁷, than with a subordinate who transgressed intentionally, $M = 44.23$, $SD = 82.85$, though these differences were not statistically significant, $F(1, 116) = 2.01$, $p = .15$. In contrast, participants in the low level condition shared, on average, significantly more money with their subordinate after he or she transgressed intentionally, $M = 113.83$, $SD = 109.46$, rather than unintentionally, $M = 74.19$, $SD = 92.08$, $F(1, 116) = 5.96$, $p = .01$.

⁷ All means reported here are in eurocents.

Figure 4.4 Average amount of money (in eurocents) shared with transgressing follower per condition in Study

2. Error bars represent 95% CI around the mean.



4.5 Study 4.3

Study 4.1 and 2 offered experimental evidence for our assertion that construal level determines leaders' disciplinary actions in response to intentional vs. non-intentional follower transgressions using very similar research designs. We conducted Study 4.3 with two major aims in mind. First, wanted to provide empirical evidence that our results generalize towards leaders responses to employee violations of moral norms in real organizations. Second, we focused on individual differences in construal level mindset rather

than priming it, in order to provide a stringent test of our argument across our studies, using several different operationalization of construal level.

4.5.1 Method

Design. The design involved an assessment of construal level (as a continuous independent variable) and an experimental recall manipulation of transgression type (intentional vs. unintentional).

Respondents. We used Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), an online community designed to bring providers of relatively small tasks in contact with workers willing to execute them to recruit one hundred and thirteen (113) respondents. In total, we invited one-hundred and twenty participants, seven of which failed an attention check at the beginning of the study, and were subsequently prevented from participating in the main study (see Oppenheimer, Mayvis, & Davidenko, 2009 for this procedure) and AMT has thus been gaining in popularity as a source for data all across the social sciences (e.g. Berinsky. Et al., 2012; Rand, et al., 2012), not in the last place organizational researches (e.g. Cryder, et al., 2013; Uhlmann, et al., 2013).

Of respondents, 40 were female (35.4%); the average age was 32.81 years ($SD = 9.14$) respondents. All respondents held paid employment at the time of the study and had at least a middle or lower level management position in their respective organizations (i.e. they supervised at least one other employee). On average participants supervised 23.19 employees ($SD = 92.04$). Eighty-three (37.5 %) of respondents indicated to hold a graduate degree; 35 (31 %) held a post-graduate degree (PhD, MBA or equivalent); twenty-five (22.1%) indicated to have completed undergraduate education only, five respondents (4.4 %) indicated to only hold a high school degree. Respondents had, on average, 9.6 years of experience working in jobs taking at least 12 hours per week ($SD = 8.44$) and indicated to work at the time of the study on average for 42.9 hours per week ($SD = 10.10$). Respondents indicated to have been working at their organizations for an average of 5.53 years ($SD = 4.40$) and had held their job for an average of 4.20 years ($SD = 3.11$). Respondents were paid \$ 0.85 for their participation in the study.

Procedure. Following procedures used by Leunissen et al. (2012) we asked half of our respondents to recall a situation in which a subordinate “unintentionally did something you felt was wrong or unjust”. The other half of our respondents were asked to recall a situation in which a subordinate “intentionally did something you felt was wrong or unjust”. In both conditions we asked respondents to recall the event “as vividly as possible” and they were prompted to consider the following questions: “what happened exactly? What did [your subordinate] say or do? What did you say or do? How did it make you feel?” Allocation to either one of these conditions was on a random basis. Twelve respondents failed to describe a situation, and ten others either wrote about an intentional transgression in the unintentional condition or vice versa. These respondents were removed from the dataset, leaving a final N of 91. There were no significant differences between the removed respondents and the others on any of the demographic variables.

Control variable. To alleviate concerns that recalled intentional transgressions are more severe than unintentional transgressions, we measured transgression severity using an item from Leunissen et al. (2012). We asked respondents to indicate “to what extent did you feel that you were harmed by your subordinate”.

Measures. To measure leader *discipline* we used a subscale from Dobbins’ (1985) validated corrective actions scale. This scale consists of twelve items describing possible actions available to a leader after a follower transgression divided over four subscales. Respondents are asked to indicate to what extent they find a given action appropriate. We used the punishment subscale (three items: “terminate the contract”, “provide written reprimand”, “decrease pay”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .64$)⁸ since this was closest to our purposes (the other subscales describe offering support and sympathy, training and monitoring).

We measured *dispositional construal level* with the Behavior Identification Form developed by Vallacher and Wegner (1989). This is by far the most often used scale to measure dispositional construal level (see e.g.

⁸ These alpha’s are quite similar to those found in previous studies (e.g. Dedrick & Dobbis, 1991; Dobbins, 1985; Pence, Pendleton, Dobbins, Sgro, 1982).

Emmons, 1992; Freitas, et al., 2009; Freitas, et al., 2001; Fujita et al., 2006; Hart & Burton, 2012; Kozak, Marsh & Wegner, 2006). It consists of 25 descriptions of actions at an intermediate level of abstraction (e.g. locking the door, picking an apple). Respondents are asked to indicate which of two re-descriptions, one relatively concrete (e.g. putting the key in the lock, pulling an apple from the branch), the other relatively abstract (e.g. securing the house, getting something to eat) they find more fitting. Higher scores on this scale represent a relative preference for abstraction and lower scores a preference for concreteness.

4.5.2 Results

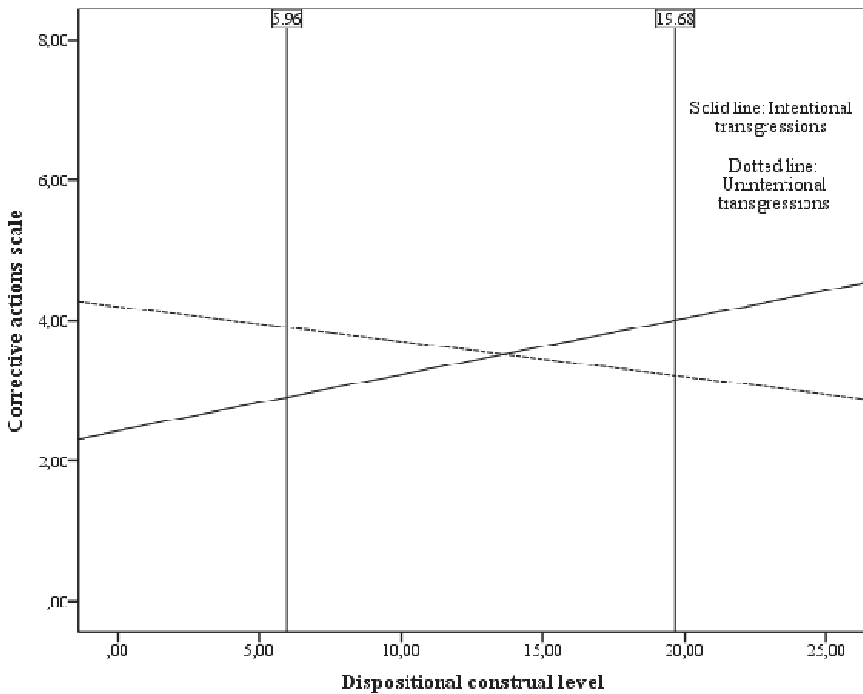
Transgression severity. Regression of the transgression severity item on the BIF, the intentionality manipulation and the interaction between these two revealed no significant interaction effect, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .11$, $t(90) = .26$, $p = .79$, nor a significant main effects for intentionality, $\beta = -.40$, $SE = 2.01$, $t(90) = 0.20$, $p = .84$, or the BIF, $\beta = -.06$, $SE = .07$, $t(90) = 0.96$, $p = .34$. Based on this, we concluded there was no reason to believe that transgression severity was influenced by our manipulation or measurement of the BIF.

Hypotheses tests. Regression of the punishment subscale on the BIF, the intentionality manipulation and the interaction between those two variables revealed a significant interaction effect, $\beta = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $t(90) = -2.16$, $p = .03$. We did not find a significant main effect of the BIF, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .04$, $t = 0.94$, $p = .35$, or a significant main effect of intentionality, $\beta = 1.99$, $SE = 1.09$, $t = 1.84$, $p = .07$. Figure 5 depicts this interaction. We used a technique developed by Johnson & Neyman (1936) to further probe this interaction. The benefit of this technique over more often used simple slope analyses that it avoids the necessity to define to arbitrary moderator values as “high” or “low” (usually based on levels +/- 1 SD from the mean). Instead, it identifies the regions of moderator values (values on the BIF) for which the effect of the independent variable (here: intentionality) are significant, and of a specific direction. We found a significant negative, $p < .05$ (one-sided⁹), relation between intentionality and punishment for BIF values of

⁹ We report one-sided tests, as we deal with directional hypotheses.

5.96 and lower. This indicates, in line with Hypothesis 1, that leaders scoring relatively low on the BIF were less likely to punish intentional than unintentional transgressors. In contrast, we found significant positive relations, $p < .05$ (one-sided), for BIF values above 19.68. This indicates, in line with Hypothesis 2, that leaders who scored relatively high on the BIF were more likely to punish intentional, rather than unintentional, transgressions.

Figure 4.5 The relation between intentionality and leader discipline as a function of dispositional construal level in Study 4.3. We found a significant, $p < .05$ (one-sided), negative association between intentionality and likelihood to punish for BIF scores below 5.96. We found a significant, $p < .05$ (one-sided), positive relation for BIF scores above 19.68.



4.6 Discussion

Leaders often have to manage conflicts between several goals at once. This is especially true for delivering discipline in response to followers' moral transgressions. Enacting disciplinary measures is often the 'right thing' to do, but it is also unpleasant and distracting (Treviño, 1992). We argued that whether or not a leader will enact disciplinary measures may depend on which of these motives (i.e. moral obligations vs. practical concerns) 'looms larger'. High construal level facilitates the expression of moral obligations in behavior and quells the influence of situational concerns. Low construal level, in contrast, facilitates a focus on the situational and the practical. The need to enforce moral rules therefore appears distracting and unpleasant to leaders in low construal level mindsets. Leaders in high construal level mindsets are thus likely to deliver discipline in response to moral (i.e. intentional) transgressions. Leaders in low construal level mindsets, however, show the opposite behavior. These leaders avoid enacting disciplinary responses to moral (i.e. intentional) transgressions, when compared to simple mistakes (i.e. unintentional transgressions).

In all three studies of the studies we report here we used different operationalizations of construal level and studied different ways of enacting disciplinary measure. Specifically, we used two different procedures to induce construal level in Studies 1 and 2, respectively. In Study 3 we measured dispositional construal level. In Study 1 we gave participants the opportunity to withhold a bonus. In Study 2 participants could report their transgressing subordinate. In Study 3 we measured the willingness to enact several different disciplinary measures. We also used two different research designs: Studies 1 and 2 were experimental laboratory studies for which we recruited students. In Study 3 we recruited leaders in organizations and employed a quasi-experimental design. Taken together, the results of these studies support show that our predictions hold even if a leader does not benefit from his or her subordinate transgressing moral rules or norms.

4.6.1 Theoretical implications

Some leaders (i.e. leaders in low construal level mindsets) are simply too preoccupied with their immediate situation to administer discipline in response to moral transgressions of followers. Previous studies have shown that when a follower transgresses in a way that benefits the leader, a leader is less inclined to enact disciplinary measures (Hoogervorst, et al., 2010). Our results show, however, that even when a leader has nothing to gain personally from a follower's transgression he or she may neglect to enact disciplinary measures. In other words, thus, we move beyond a simple dichotomy between self-interest and morality (Hunt et al., 2010). This failure to enact disciplinary measures in response to follower moral transgressions sits uneasily with the central tenets of ethical leadership theory (Brown, & Treviño, 2006). After all, an ethical leader is supposed not only to encourage ethical follower behavior but also to discourage moral transgressions by followers (Gini, 1997). Our results thus indicate that leader low construal level is associated with lower levels of ethical leadership (at least what regards the disciplinary aspects of ethical leadership).

Most extant research on leader discipline has focused on the consequences of leader discipline (Ball, Treviño, & Sims, 1992). In fact, most extant research has focused on the consequence of leader discipline for follower performance (Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). With the research reported here we thus go beyond this literature in two ways. First, we focused on the antecedents of leader discipline. Secondly, we also go beyond the exclusive focus on performance and focus on moral behaviors instead. In fact, our research shows that focusing too much on performance may be morally dangerous. A leader who focuses solely on inspiring optimal performance in the current situation may be likely to neglect disciplining morally transgressing followers. This is clearly morally and socially undesirable. Our research thus implies that leaders need to be able to disengage from situational aims to deliver discipline in a morally and socially desirable way.

Our research also further extends the relevance of construal level theory into the leadership domain. Construal level theory has proven to be an important and versatile theoretical perspective in the intrapersonal

and cognitive domains (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Several scholars have already called for further application of this theory to better understand leader cognition (e.g. Popper, 2012; Tumasjan, Strobel, & Welpe, 2008). This call has up to now gone barely answered. Our results and arguments illustrate how construal level has meaningful consequences situations in which leaders have to deal with multiple, conflicting, goals. This is almost always the case: Leaders in organizations usually stand at the cross-roads of different interests and needs (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, & Farh, 2011; Rizzo, et al., 1970). For example, leaders usually have to both safeguard the interests of higher level agents' (e.g. shareholder) interests and take follower needs into account simultaneously. Construal level theory therefore provides an important perspective for leadership scholars to understand how leaders deal with conflicts between various goals (Freitas, Clark, Kim, & Levy, 2009).

More generally, it is often presumed that people (including leaders) perceive their moral obligations as positive guidelines for behavior (Rai, & Fiske, 2011; Haidt, 2008). Failures to uphold these obligations are then attributed to a lack of self-control (Balliet, & Joireman, 2010) or certain unconscious affective influences (Gaudine, & Thorne, 2001). Our arguments and results indicate otherwise. People may also perceive the need to yield to moral obligations as frustratingly distracting them from reaching certain more practical aims. This has substantial behavioral consequences. In this chapter we focused on one of these: leader disciplinary behavior. We showed that the construal of moral obligations (i.e. as guidelines or frustrations) has direct effect for the motivation to enforce moral rules and norms. More in general thus, our arguments and findings indicate people's willingness to yield to moral obligations is dependent upon the way that they perceive these. This finding should be further incorporated in models of ethical decision making.

4.6.2 Practical implications

Leaders may focus too much on practical matters. When they do so, they are likely to neglect their moral duties. This is the simple message of this chapter. Disciplining a follower who transgresses a moral rule

or norm is such a moral obligation. Low construal level mindset is a mindset that facilitates a preoccupation with practical matters. High construal level mindset facilitates the motivational pull of moral obligations. Hence, a leader neglecting to enforce moral rules is more likely when he or she is in a low construal level mindset. The literature has associated many practically relevant factors with construal level (Burgoon et al., 2013). The most important of these is undoubtedly distance: events and objects close by (in space and/or time, among other things) are generally represented at lower levels of construal (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). Our results therefore point to the perils of setting too short-term targets for lower and middle level management (Johnson, Garrison, Hernez-Broome, Fleenor, & Steed, 2012). Short-term targets are likely to engender a short-term focus (and therefore a low construal level mindset) among lower and middle managers. These managers are then, by consequence, unlikely to enact disciplinary measures when these are needed the most: when followers transgress intentionally. Hence, to promote the enactment of discipline when it is needed organizations should allow leaders the relative 'luxury' to be able to disengage from the immediate context.

4.6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

One limitation of Study 4.1 and 2 is that these studies employed a laboratory context using undergraduate students in which leader follower interactions were limited to a few (simulated) moments of contact through computer-assisted communication. We are well-aware that leadership processes in organizations take place in much more complex, social arenas and that studying undergraduate behavior can be a suboptimal proxy for studying leader behavior. Yet, a lab-setting offers a controlled environment to study causal relationships, especially for such sensitive topics as leader discipline. Lab research among undergraduate students has thus started to gain momentum among leadership scholars (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa & Chan, 2009). Nonetheless, we attempted to address the potential limitations of Study 4.1 and 4.2 in two ways. First, we designed these studies to provide a realistic simulation of actual working

relationships and an engaging job simulation task (Hoogervorst, et al., 2012; Whetzel, et al., 2014). Second, we replicated our findings in a field setting using organizational leaders in Study 4.3. The consistent results across lab (Study 4.1 and 2) and field studies (Study 4.3) increases our confidence in the robustness of our results.

We do, nonetheless, acknowledge that the social context of the organization adds a level of complexity that we could not model in our studies. For instance, we focused in all our studies, even in our third study, on one-off encounters between leader and employee. However, when both leader and employee are part of a team and may have a longer history working together. Arguably, this may influence punishing behavior. First, a pragmatically thinking leader may be inclined to discipline transgressing followers even though he or she performs well, because the leader is aware of the preferences of other team members. Because of this, we would like to urge future research to investigate to what extent the processes we have described also hold for public contexts. Secondly, it makes sense that leaders may treat a history of unintentional or intentional transgressions differently than a one-off occurrence. For instance, a history of unintentional transgressions may signal incompetence (Kee & Knox, 1970) and may thus be a reason to demote an employee or terminate the contract (both disciplinary responses), whereas a one-off mistake may not be. Hence, future research could focus on the differential effects of a history of intentional or unintentional transgressions versus one-off mistakes on leader discipline.

4.7 Concluding remarks

It is comforting to assume that leaders under all circumstances will want to act upon moral rules, and that any failure to do so is caused by inattentiveness or mistakes. Not so. When leaders focus too much on the current situation, moral rules are likely to appear to them not as positive guidelines for good behavior but as frustrations and restrictive impediments. Effective enforcement of moral rules by organizational leaders thus requires the ability to mentally disengage from the immediate situation.

Chapter 5. Trust Maintenance as a Function of Construal Level and Attributions: the Case of Apologies

Only a quick look at recent history shows that apologies are often offered by perpetrators not only after relatively minor, interpersonal, transgressions (Leunissen, De Cremer, Reinders Folmer, & Van Dijke, 2012), but also in response to tragedies such as war crimes (e.g. the prime minister of Japan expressing regret for Japanese war crimes in China, Yuan, January 18, 2013) or environmental disasters (e.g. the CEO of British Petroleum [BP] launching an ad-campaign to apologize for the oil spill Mexican gulf in 2010, Smith, June 4, 2010). Hence, even if there would not be several decades' of apology-research in the conflict management and social psychology literatures (Levine, & West, 1976; Ohbuchi, & Sato, 1994; Skarlicki, Folger, & Gee, 2004), it would seem obvious that apologies are an important tool to manage and maintain trust in various types of relationships (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009). Even so, research has taught us much about the process leading from an apology to the granting of trust, by establishing – for instance – that apologies relieve the victim of the transgressions (“trustor”) of causal uncertainty relating to the transgression (Van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2011) and provide information on the perpetrator’s benevolence towards the trustor as well as his or her integrity (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004).

However, despite its long history, the apology literature arguably suffers from an important limitation. Perhaps because apologies are delivered by the perpetrator (“trustee”), the vast majority of research in this area has examined trustee-side antecedents of the effect of apologies on trust maintenance (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). This is problematic, since trust maintenance is a two-way street in which not only the trustee but also the addressee of an apology (the trustor) has a role to play (Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009). In fact, most recent apology research has focused on investigating how trustees can vary attributions (e.g. internal or external to him or her, Kim, et al., 2004) to restore trust (see Tomlinson, & Mayer, 2009 for an overview). However, in doing so, the literature has neglected the fact that the trustor is not forced to grant trust in response to the specific attribution used – the trustor may also simply respond to the fact that an apology is offered in the

first place, regardless of the type of attribution used. This is in line with much earlier research (e.g. Nichols, 1990; Schlenker, & Darby, 1981) which has conceptualized an apology mainly as a symbolic gesture aimed at making amends (Desmet, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2011).

Because of this, we argue that it is important for apology research to strive to better understand how a trustor construes the apology, or, in other words, whether a trustor is sensitive to the attributional information that is contained in the delivery of an apology. As we will argue in more detail below, this makes the abstractness or concreteness of the trustor's mental construals, or construal level (Trope, & Liberman, 2010), directly relevant. Construal level is the mechanism that regulates the sensitivity of cognition, evaluation and decision making to variable cues (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010), such as – we suggest – attributions in apologies. Abstraction is described within construal level theory as a disengagement from variable informational cues and a focus on stable ones, low level construal, in contrast, implies a focus on more variable informational elements (Burgoon, Henderson, & Markman, 2013). Hence, we suggest that low level construal makes trustors more, and high level construal less, sensitive to attributional information delivered by means of an apology. Because of this, low level construal should lead trustors to grant trust flexibly as a function of the attribution used. High level construal, in contrast, should lead trustors to grant trustors to grant trust consistently, regardless of the type of attribution used.

This research corrects the overly passive portrayal of the trustor that has inadvertently emerged in previous research. In fact, our use of construal-level theory as an explanatory framework allows us to provide novel insights not only as to why an apology affects the trustor decision to grant (or not grant) trust and whether attributional information is important for that decision. Additionally, as we will discuss more extensively below, we base our arguments and studies on Weiner's (1986) complete attribution model, rather than only using part of it – as previous research has done (e.g. Kim et al., 2004; Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007). Using this strategy we are able to test the effectiveness of trust-promotion strategies that go beyond the simple and often studied internal versus external attributions dichotomy, answering calls in the literature

by doing so (e.g. Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009).

5.1 Theoretical background

5.1.1 Apologies, attributions and construal level. Apologies are commonly understood to be social accounts that include both a causal explanation of the transgression (an ‘attribution’) and a statement of regret, typically offered after a transgression by the trustee in order to make amends (Kim, et al., 2009; Tomlinson, & Mayer, 2009). Most, though not all, recent apology research has relied on an attributional analysis to explain the effect of apologies (see e.g. Kim et al., 2004; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Struthers et al., 2008). This research, by and large, has shown that for normative transgressions (on which we focus here) attributions to causes external to the trustee (e.g. “he made me do it”) are more effective than attributions to causes internal to the trustee (e.g. “I did it”). Typically, in his research the effect of an apology on trust is thought to be associated with the kind of attribution used (e.g. Kim et al., 2006; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, & Uchiyama, 2008). On the face of it, this is, of course, a perfectly reasonable assumption: after all, the attribution is the element of an apology which may be varied by the trustee. Hence, it is no wonder that variations in the effectiveness of apologies have been linked to variations in apologies.

However, an apology is more than the attribution used, and there is thus no reason to suspect that the trustor will always be affected only by the attribution embedded in an apology. In fact, in much earlier research apologies were routinely described as statements of regret and/or symbolic gestures aimed at making amends and apology effectiveness was thus thought to be related to these aspects of the apology delivery (e.g. Nichols, 1990; Schlenker, & Darby, 1981). This latter conceptualization is a more inclusive understanding of the apology. After all, even though an apology of necessity contains an attribution (Kim et al., 2004), the precise form that attribution may take is highly variable from apology to apology (Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987) and usually at least to some extent determined by the way that a trustee chooses to frame the transgression. In contrast, all apologies of necessity exhibit this symbolic connotation (as a gesture aimed at amends; Lazare, 2004). This implies that whether or not attributions in apologies will affect trust, thus,

should depend on the trustor's understanding of the apology. Specifically, we posit that for this attributional effect to occur the trustor needs a relatively detailed focus. After all, he or she needs to take note of the specific attribution used in the apology – as we have argued, a highly variable element. In contrast, when trustors understand the apology in a more inclusive manner, attributions should affect trust as much. Within construal level theory (Trope, & Liberman, 2010) such a detailed understanding is called a 'low level' construal, whereas a more inclusive understanding is called a 'high level' construal.

Construal level refers to the abstractness or concreteness of our mental representations of stimuli or events (Burgoon, Henderson & Markman, 2013). Construal level theory (see Trope, & Liberman, 2010 for the most recent statement) posits that these representations (or 'construals') oscillate between high (that is: abstract) and low (concrete) levels of construal. Within construal level theory abstraction is considered to be a removal or disengagement from detailed and variable information and a focus on more 'gist-like' information (Burgoon, et al., 2013). In line with this, for instance, high level construal has been associated with classification of stimuli in broader, more inclusive, categories than low level construal (e.g. Day, & Bartels, 2008; Henderson, 2013). This is because, for two stimuli of a similar kind, we need to focus on details to see differences between them (e.g. a Dalmatian and a German shepherd are two different breeds), whereas we need to disengage from variable details to see similarities (both Dalmatians and German shepherds are dogs, Lin, Murphy, & Shoben, 1997). Because of this, high level construals tend to be more structured and schematic than low level construals (Namkoong, & Henderson, 2013) and have been known to quell the influence of variable, detailed, informational cues on evaluation and decision making (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010). In contrast, low level construal has been shown to facilitate the expression of variable details in evaluation and decision and to quell the influence of stable cues (Ledger, Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

It thus stands to reason that a trustor needs a low level construal mindset to differentiate between apologies on the basis of the apology used. After all, attributions are arguably variable and thus detailed elements of the apology and are thus unlikely to be part of a high level construal. Thus, whereas attributions

that are communicated via the use of apologies drive trust responses under low level construal, high level construal quells this influence. Because of this, we argue that low level construal is associated with relatively flexible trust restoration. Flexible in the sense that trust is granted by a low level trustor in response to the precise attribution used. By the same token, high level construal is associated with consistent trust responses across apologies – after all, attributions matter less for high level construal level. Therefore, trust and trust restoration under high level construal should thus be independent from the attribution used.

5.1.2 Locus of causality, controllability, stability and construal level

Our framework implies that attributions come in many shapes and sizes. This is in line with Weiner's (1986) attribution framework, according to which attributions do not vary so much in kind, but rather along dimensions. Weiner's (1986) model differentiates three such dimensions: locus of causality, controllability and stability.

Locus of causality refers to the extent to which the cause of a transgression was the trustee him- or herself or, rather, something or someone external to the trustee (Weiner, 1986). Research shows that, in the context of normative transgressions, external attributions in apologies are more effective than internal attributions (Kim et al., 2009). This is because external attributions deflect blame, whereas internal attributions imply an acceptance of blame (Kim et al., 2004). To the best of our knowledge, extant research on the role of attributions in apologies has solely focused on the effect of differences along locus of causality dimension (e.g. Kim et al., 2004; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006). However, both other attribution dimensions are relevant for trust as well.

Controllability denotes the extent to which an agent could have prevented the transgression from happening. Hence, a controllable attribution indicates that the trustee could have prevented the transgression, but chose not to do so, thus putting in doubt the trustee's benevolence towards the trustor (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). Because of this, attributions of uncontrollability (e.g. "I couldn't help it") should be more effective trust maintenance tools than attributions of controllability (e.g. "I could have helped it").¹

Lastly, Stability describes the temporal persistence of a cause: a cause that is likely to be encountered in future situations is more stable than a cause that is present in the current situation only (Weiner, 1986). Hence, in the context of transgressions, stable (relative to unstable) attributions give the trustor more reason to form negative expectations with regard to the trustee's future behavior and thus to decrease trust. After all, if a transgression can be attributed to a stable cause, this implies that the transgression is more likely to happen again, which should make trustors reluctant to grant trust.

In sum, attributions may vary along all three dimensions simultaneously – an attribution may be internal, stable and uncontrollable (e.g. a mental condition) as much as they might be external, unstable and controllable (e.g. a tempting situation). In line with the analyses above, thus, variations along these dimensions should have more (negative as well as positive) effect on trustor trust under trustor low, rather than high, level construal mindset. Specifically, in the context of transgressions of moral norms, external attributions should be more effective than internal attributions, uncontrollable attributions should be more effective than controllable ones and unstable attributions should be more effective than stable ones. Hence, low level construal makes trustors more sensitive to attributional variations leading them to grant trust in a flexible manner. High level construal, in contrast, should make trustors less sensitive to such variations, leading them to grant trust in a more consistent manner, regardless of the attributions used.

5.2 Hypotheses

Based on this reasoning, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5.1: *Following a transgression, an apology containing an external attribution is more effective in promoting trust than an apology containing an internal attribution, but this effect is more pronounced for low- than for high-level-construal trustors.*

Hypothesis 5.2: *Following a transgression, an apology containing an uncontrollable attribution is more effective in promoting trust than an apology containing a controllable attribution, but this effect is more pronounced for low- than for high construal level trustors.*

Hypothesis 5.3: *Following a transgression, an apology containing an unstable attribution is more effective in promoting trust than an apology containing a stable attribution, but this effect is more pronounced for low- than for high-level-construal trustors.*

Our research strategy largely followed our explanatory strategy: rather than testing all eight possible combinations of variations along the three attribution dimensions in one study, we opted to test differences alongside each of the dimensions in three different studies, while holding the other two dimensions constant (see Weiner, et al., 1987, for a comparable procedure). Thus, in Study 5.1 we tested for the effect of internal versus external attributions on trust, while holding the controllability and stability dimensions constant; in Study 5.2 we held the locus and stability dimensions constant, while varying attributions alongside the controllability dimension; and in Study 5.3 we varied the stability of the attributions while holding the locus and the controllability dimensions constant. In this way, we thought we would be able to get more-detailed information on the precise function of differences along the three dimensions in the trust-maintenance process.

We tested our predictions in a set of three laboratory experiments, one for each attribution dimension. In all three studies, participants were asked to interact with each other to work on a collaborative task in an organization consisting of three hierarchical tiers (bottom, middle, and top). All participants were assigned to the middle tier and asked to allocate tasks to others in the lowest tier. We chose to study these processes in this hierarchical setting, since this gave participants an incentive to be interested in the trustworthiness of their collaboration partners (i.e. their subordinates). Participants were then confronted with a transgression committed by a subordinate member of the organization and, after a construal-level-mindset induction, with an apology from that member. As dependent variable, we measured participants' willingness to allocate a crucial task to the transgressors, as a basic indication of trust (Kim et al., 2004). This is an interesting indicator of trust, as it shows a willingness to depend on the trustee's actions (Kim et al., 2009). We employed two well-validated construal-level primes (developed by Freitas Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004 and Lin, et al.,

1997) to be able to generalize across experimental procedures.

5.3 Study 5.1

5.3.1 Method

Participants and design. One hundred and thirteen undergraduate business students from a medium-sized European university ($M_{age} = 20.68$, $SD = 2.67$, 61 women (54 %)) participated in this study, either for partial course credit or for a monetary reward (€5.00, ca. \$6.37 at the time of the study). The participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (construal level: high vs. low) X 2 (attribution locus: internal vs. external) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles. All information was communicated via a computer screen. Participants were informed that over the course of the study they would be working for a small simulated company, consisting of one CEO, several middle managers and a number of low-level subordinates (adapted from Bruins & Wilke, 1993; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2007). Each middle manager was ostensibly responsible for two subordinates and reported to the CEO. Subsequently, all participants were informed that they were selected to fill the middle manager role. They were also informed that all other roles would be fulfilled by other participants. In reality, however, all interactions were pre-programmed.

We modeled our procedures on several other trust-and-apology studies (see e.g., Cramwinckel, et al., 2013; Hoogervorst, et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2004). As a first assignment, participants were asked to allocate different tasks to their two subordinates. They were told that they would shortly receive some additional information on each subordinate as well as texts by the subordinates introducing themselves. For one of the two subordinates, the additional information included a description of a transgression the subordinate had committed in a previous study. Participants were informed that the subordinate had been caught cheating during a study similar to the one they were currently involved in, and that as a result, the team this subordinate was in had lost all the money they had earned up to that moment.

While participants were waiting for the subordinate's messages, we asked them to participate in another short study. This study was presented as a "short thought exercise [to help you get] into the right mindset of an effective manager." In reality, we introduced our construal level prime at this point. We used the procedure that was developed and validated by Freitas and colleagues (Freitas, et al., 2004). As part of this procedure, participants were asked to generate either superordinate ends (high-level condition) or subordinate means (low-level condition) for a particular goal. For example, participants in the high-level condition were prompted with the question, "Why do you want to maintain and improve your grades in school?" After responding, participants then answered four questions of the same kind, each time with their previous answer as a target. For instance, if a participant answered, "So that I can get a good job later" on the previous question, they would then be prompted with the question, "Why do you want to get a good job later?" and so on. Participants completed four iterations of this question-and-answer process twice: once with "maintain and improve grades in school," and once with "dress nicely" as targets. Participants in the low-level condition completed an almost identical procedure, except that each question began with "How would you...?" (For instance, "How would you go about maintaining and improving your grades in school?"). This priming procedure is used widely in the construal-level literature (e.g., Fujita & Roberts, 2010; Fujita, et al., 2006; Torelli & Kaikati, 2008) and consistently induces high- versus low construal level mindsets (Freitas et al., 2004; McCrea, et al., 2012).

After participants had gone through this priming procedure, they ostensibly returned to the simulated company setting. After a while, they received a message from the transgressing subordinate. In this message the trustee apologized for her behavior during a previous study. The content of the message was based on materials used by Kim et al. (2004; see also Kim et al., 2006; Ferrin, et al., 2007). In the internal attribution condition, the trustee apologized, admitted guilt, and explained that she "just could not resist the temptation." In the external attribution condition, the trustee also apologized but maintained to be only "partly guilty" and claimed to have been pressured by her team leader to cheat. Both these attributions, we suggest, are

controllable (the subordinate could still have resisted the team leader's pressure or the temptation) and unstable.

We then assessed our dependent variable and did a comprehension check (in that order, to prevent hypothesis-guessing). Participants were told they were not required to perform any more tasks and fully debriefed. We also asked participants a standard hypothesis-probing question ("What do you think this study was about?"); none came up with the right response. None of the participants objected to the procedures they had been asked to follow.

Comprehension check. To check whether participants correctly understood the contents of the apology, we asked them to indicate on a forced-choice response scale how the trustee responded to the accusations. The response options were: 1) by admitting to cheating and admitting to be personally responsible, 2) by admitting to cheating but stating that another person had helped create the problem, 3) by denying the accusations, and 4) by neither admitting to nor denying the accusations (see Kim et al., 2004 for a similar procedure).

Dependent variable. As a measure of trust, we asked participants to indicate whether they would allocate a task "they consider critical for their own success" to this particular subordinate (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely*). This measure is based on the definition of trust as willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another (Mayer et al., 1995), and thus it captures a key element of trust. It is similar to the items in frequently used trust scales (e.g., Mayer & Davis, 1999) although it measures behavior rather than trusting attitudes (see Kim et al., 2004, Kim et al., 2006 and Ferrin et al., 2007 for similar procedures).

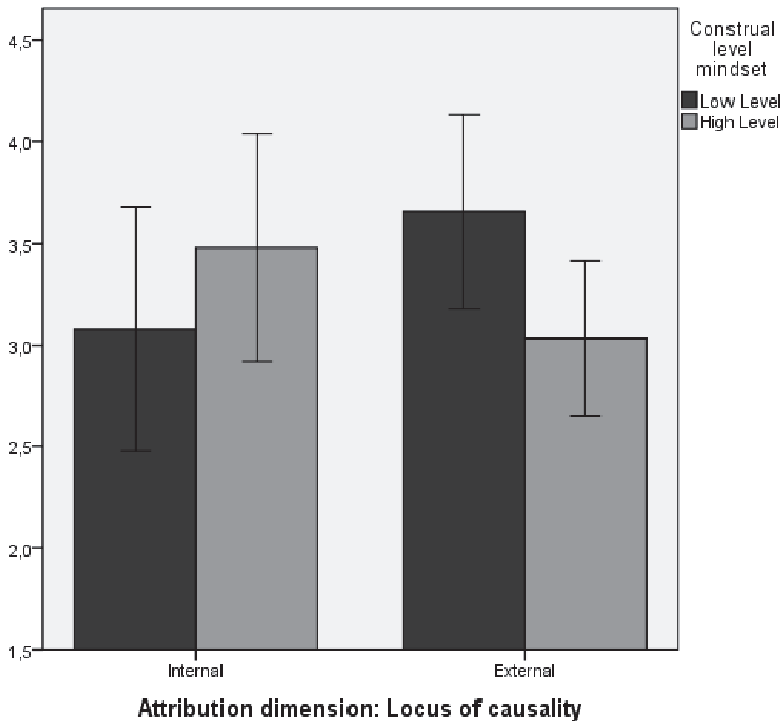
5.3.2 Results

Comprehension check. In the condition in which the transgressor communicated an internal attribution through with her apology, 86.5% of participants indicated that this person admitted being personally responsible. In this condition, 13.5% of participants indicated that the transgressor admitted to cheating but stated that another person had helped create the problem. In the condition in which the

transgressor included an external attribution with her apology, 27.9% of participants indicated that this person admitted to be personally responsible, whereas 70.1% indicated that the transgressor admitted to cheating but stated that another person had helped create the problem. In neither case did a participant choose another response option. We therefore used binary logistic regression to test whether the differences between the conditions in these two alternative answers were significant. This analysis, which included both experimental manipulations and the interaction between them as independent variables, revealed a significant main effect for attribution locus ($B = 2.55$, $SE = .67$, $Wald(1) = 14.28$, $p < 0.001$, $Odds\ ratio = 12.78$, 95% CI [3.41, 47.90]) but no significant main effect for construal level ($p = .77$) and no significant interaction effect ($p = .59$). Participants in the internal-attribution condition were thus significantly more likely to indicate that the trustee admitted to cheating and took full responsibility than participants in the external-attribution condition. This confirms that our manipulation was successful.

Hypothesis test. ANOVA with construal level and attribution locus as independent variables and willingness to allocate a crucial task as dependent variable revealed no significant main effect for construal level ($F(1, 109) = .78$, $p = .38$) or for attribution locus ($F(1, 109) = 1.03$, $p = .31$). The analysis did reveal a significant construal-level by attribution-locus interaction effect, however ($F(1, 109) = 4.35$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Figure 1 depicts this interaction. Subsequent simple-effects analyses revealed that for low-level-construal trustors, external attributions were significantly more effective in restoring trust ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.55$) than internal attributions ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.08$, $F(1, 109) = 4.79$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$). For high construal level trustors, there was no significant difference between internal ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.50$) and external attributions ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.37$, $F(1, 109) = .57$, $p = .45$, $\eta^2 = .01$). These results support Hypothesis 1.

Figure 5.1 Effect of construal-level mindset and locus of control attribution type on willingness to allocate a crucial task in Study 5.1. Error bars represent 95% CIs around the cell mean.



5.4 Study 5.2

In Study 5.2, we tested the effects of controllability attributions as a function of the trustor's construal-level mindset. We predicted that attributions of uncontrollability should be more effective to restore trust than attributions of controllability, but mainly under conditions of trustor low construal level mindset.

5.4.1 Method

Participants and design. One hundred and thirty-two undergraduate business students ($M_{age} = 20.26$, $SD = 1.54$, 61 women (46.2%)) participated in this study for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to a 2 (construal level: high versus low) X 2 (controllability attribution: controllable versus uncontrollable) between-subject factorial design.

Procedure. The procedure for this study was virtually identical to the one we followed in Study 5.1, with the exception of two differences. First, in this study we used a different method to prime construal-level mindset. Instead of the why/how priming procedure developed by Freitas et al. (2004), we used a categorization task developed by Lin et al. (1997). In this procedure, participants are asked to come up with either commonalities (high construal level) or differences (low construal level) in uses, materials, attributes and essential parts in each of four sets containing four objects or animals. One set included a white T-shirt, a high-heeled shoe, sandals and jeans (set A). The other sets consisted of a dump truck, a sedan, a convertible and a speedboat (set B); a Dalmatian (a breed of dog), a goldfish, a German shepherd and a hawk (set C); and a coffee table, a folding chair, a reclining chair and a table lamp (set D). Searching for commonalities requires thinking in broader and higher level categories (e.g., sandals and high-heeled shoes are both examples of footwear), which necessitates a higher level of construal. Searching for differences, by contrast, requires thinking in smaller, lower-level categories (e.g., high-heeled shoes tend to be worn exclusively by women); this engenders a lower level of construal (see also Fujita & Roberts, 2010). We decided to use this different prime to explore whether our effects generalize across primes and can thus confidently be attributed to variations in construal level.

The second difference between Study 5.1 and 2 is that in the latter, we used attributions of controllability rather than locus-of-causality attributions as manipulations. Our controllability manipulation was operationalized according to Weiner's (1986) definition of this attribution dimension, and was based on manipulations of controllability from the attribution literature (e.g., Deuser & Anderson, 1995; Huang, Lin &

Wen, 2010; Lupfer & Gingrich, 1999; Roese & Olson, 1995; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Within this literature, controllability is usually manipulated as an outcome that could (controllable attribution) or could not (uncontrollable attribution) have been prevented by an agent. As an illustration, Weiner et al. (1988) manipulated the controllability of certain stigmas by varying the extent to which these were self-inflicted (e.g., acquiring AIDS either through an infected blood transfusion or because of a promiscuous sex life). Similarly, Lupfer and Ginrich (1999) operationalized controllability of an illness or affliction as either self-inflicted (e.g., getting lung cancer from smoking) or induced by an unhappy circumstance (e.g., allergies). To be sure, the key element of these operationalizations is whether these harms were preventable, not that the harm was self-inflicted (harm inflicted upon others may be controllable as well) or that an outcome came about volitionally (it is unlikely that one would want to get lung cancer, even if one smokes).

Based on these examples and the definition of a controllability attribution, we developed our own manipulations. In our controllable condition, the transgressor admitted to cheating and claimed to have suffered from a “lapse in my judgment.” The transgressor further admitted knowing that she should not have acted in this manner “but somehow still chose to do so.” In this condition, the trustee thus clearly stated that she could have prevented the transgression from happening but refrained from doing so. In contrast, in the uncontrollable condition, the transgressor explained that a previous participant had left her answers in the cubicle for a task that required recognizing colors, while the trustee claimed to be colorblind. The trustee then proceeded to copy these answers. Colorblindness arguably is an uncontrollable condition in the sense that it is unavoidable and not self-inflicted. In addition, we believe that both attributions are to be placed at a similar position along the locus-of-causality and stability dimensions. After all, both attributions are relatively unstable (the trustee is in both cases unlikely to act similarly again) and internal (a lapse of judgment versus colorblindness).

Manipulation check. Because the Lin et al. (1997) categorization procedure has not been validated as extensively as the Freitas et al. (2004) why/how procedure, we included a manipulation check for the

effectiveness of the prime in Study 5.2. For this we followed Fujita and Roberts's (2010) procedure and used an adapted version of Vallacher and Wegner's (1989) behavioral-identification form (BIF), which is widely used to measure the level of abstraction in mental construals (e.g., Liberman, et al, 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000). In this adapted version (see also Fujita & Roberts, 2010), participants are confronted with 10 activities and two possible descriptions for each activity. One option describes the activity in terms of its means, the other in terms of its superordinate goals. Participants could indicate on a 7-point Likert scale which description they found better fitting. For instance, for the activity "washing clothes" participants could choose between "putting dirty clothes in the machine" (low-level description) and "removing odors from clothes" (high-level description). The answers were averaged into a scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$).

Comprehension check. We checked the effectiveness of our controllability attribution manipulation by asking participants to indicate (forced choice) how the trustee responded to the accusations. The four choices were: 1) by taking personal responsibility and indicating that she or she had been cheating volitionally, 2) by stating that other causes out of her his or her direct control contributed to the problem, 3) by denying the accusation, and 4) by not admitting to or denying the accusations.

Dependent variable. The dependent variable we used was the same trust measure as in Study 5.1.

5.4.2 Results

Manipulation checks. We used ANOVA to analyze the effects of our manipulations on the behavioral identification form. This analysis revealed an effect for construal level ($F(1, 128) = 3.50, p = .08, \eta^2 = .02$)¹⁰, but no effect for controllability of the attribution ($p = .23$) or a significant interaction effect ($p = .50$). This indicates that our construal level priming procedure successfully induced a high- versus low construal level-level mindset.

In the condition in which the trustee communicated high controllability through her apology, 77.4% of the participants indicated that the trustee had made a controllable attribution, while 22.6% indicated that

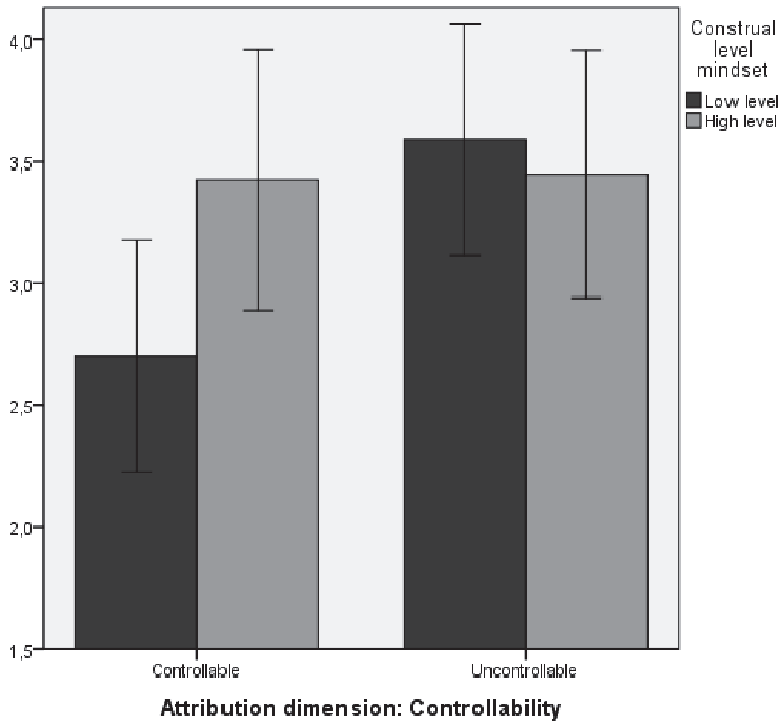
¹⁰ This relatively weak effect for a manipulation check is probably explained by the relatively low reliability of the scale.

the trustee had made an attribution to an uncontrollable cause. In the condition in which the trustee communicated low controllability through her apology, 52.9% of the participants indicated that the trustee had made an uncontrollable attribution while 47.1% indicated that she trustee had made a controllable attribution. One participant (in the uncontrollable condition) indicated that the trustee had denied the accusations completely. We excluded this participant from further analysis.¹¹ Logistic-regression analysis to determine whether the difference between the controllable and uncontrollable conditions on the two-level check were significant, revealed a significant main effect of attribution type ($B = 1.08$, $SE = .53$, $Wald(1) = 4.08$, $p = .04$, $Odds\ Ratio = 2.93$, 95% CI [1.03, 8.34]), but no significant effect for construal level ($p = .25$) or a significant interaction effect ($p = .47$). In sum, participants in the controllable condition found the attribution used asserted more controllability than participants in the uncontrollable condition. This shows that this manipulation was successful.

Hypothesis test. ANOVA with controllability attribution and construal level as independent variables and willingness to allocate a critical task as dependent variable revealed no significant main effect for construal level ($F(1, 128) = .35$, $p = .63$) or for attribution type ($F(1, 128) = 3.66$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .03$). In keeping with our expectations, the analysis revealed a significant controllability- attribution by construal-level interaction effect ($F(1, 128) = 5.17$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Figure 2 depicts this effect. Simple effects analyses revealed that in the low construal level condition, the willingness to allocate a critical task was significantly higher after an uncontrollable attribution ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.58$) than after a controllable attribution ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .93$, $F(1, 128) = 8.59$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$). In the high-level condition, mean differences between controllable ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.69$) and uncontrollable attributions ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.21$) were not significant ($F(1, 128) = .06$, $p = .80$). These results support Hypothesis 2.

¹¹ The results did not change when this participant was included.

Figure 5.2. Effect of construal level mindset and controllability attribution type on willingness to allocate a crucial task in Study 5.2. Error bars represent 95% CIs around the cell mean.



5.5 Study 5.3

Study 5.3 was designed to test whether the stability-attribution dimension also interacts with the trustor's construal-level mindset. Stability refers to the persistence of a certain cause. Unstable causes are those that are relatively fleeting (e.g., temptations), whereas stable causes are more likely to affect behavior consistently over time (e.g., disposition; Weiner, 1985). As stable causes are more predictive of future

behavior than unstable causes, the latter should be more effective in restoring trust than the former, especially so for low construal level trustors.

5.5.1 Methods

Participants and design. One hundred and sixty-one business students ($M_{age} = 20.83$, $SD = 1.66$, 70 women (43.5 %)) participated in this study for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to a 2 (construal level: high vs. low) X 2 (attribution stability: stable vs. unstable) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure. The procedure for this study was once again identical to the one used in Studies 1 and 2. We again used Freitas and colleagues' (2004) why/how priming procedure to engender high- versus low-level-construal mindsets. The only difference from Study 5.1 was that this time the apology of the trustee contained either a stable or an unstable attribution. No prior research has included stability attributions in the context of trust and reconciliation. We developed our manipulation based on stability-attribution manipulations from the literature on attribution theory (e.g., Corrigan et al., 2001; Donovan, & Williams, 2003; Thomas, & Mathieu, 1994; Tsiros, Mittal, & Ross, 2004). In this literature, stability attributions are typically operationalized as either causes that are exceptions to a certain known normal situation (unstable attributions) or are the normal situation itself (stable attributions). Huang et al. (2010), for instance, manipulated stability attributions for encountering a noisy setting in a restaurant by telling participants to imagine themselves eating in a restaurant that is either always noisy (stable cause) or generally quiet but found to be noisy once (unstable cause). In a similar way, Hess, Ganesan, and Klein (2003) operationalized stability attributions for a service failure by asking participants to imagine that they either have (stable cause) or have never (unstable cause) had previous experiences with failures from a service provider. To be sure, the key element of these manipulations is *not* that stability can be conceptualized as past experience, but that stability has to do with the known persistence of a certain cause.

In line with this literature, in the stable condition the transgressing follower said they had trouble with resisting temptations. The message said that the trustee was very sorry, but that they could “not promise it

will not happen again.” In the unstable condition, by contrast, the trustee stated quite clearly that it was a one-off event that would not happen again. Thus, in the stable condition the perpetrator emphasized the probability of the same behavior’s occurring again, while in the unstable condition, in keeping with Weiner’s (1986) description of this attribution dimension, he or she stated explicitly that the same behavior would not occur again. Both these attributions, we argue, are internal and controllable. (Even if it is difficult, temptations can be resisted).

Comprehension check. Following the same approach we used in Studies 1 and 2, we used a comprehension check for our stability manipulation. We asked participants to indicate whether the trustee had responded to the accusations by 1) apologizing and promising to do better in the future, 2) apologizing, but indicating at the same time that they could not promise to do better in the future, 3) denying the accusations, or 4) neither admitting to nor denying the accusations.

Dependent variable. We used the same trust measure as a dependent variable that we had used in Study 5.1 and 5.2.

5.5.2 Results

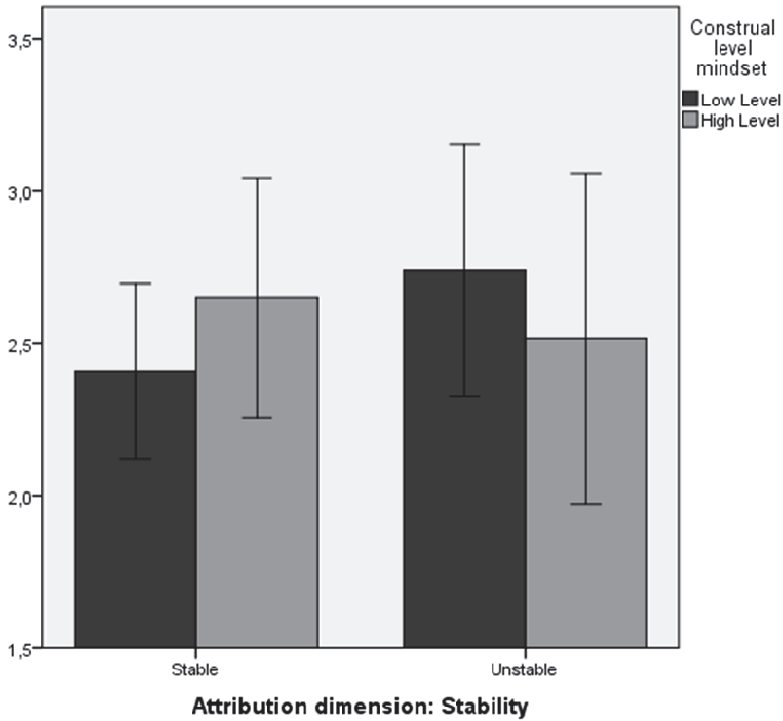
Manipulation check. In the condition in which a stable attribution was communicated through the apology, 88.1% of participants indicated that the transgressor could not promise to do better in the future, while 10.7% indicated that the trustee had promised to do better. In the condition in which an unstable attribution was included with the apology, 97.4% indicated that the trustee had promised to do better in the future, while 2.6% indicated that the trustee had not done so. One participant (in the stable attribution condition) indicated that the trustee neither admitted nor denied the accusation. This participant was excluded from further analysis.¹² As in Study 5.1 and 5.2, we used binary-logistic regression to test for the success of our manipulation. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for attribution stability ($B = -5.15$, $SE = .865$, $Wald(1) = 35.37$, $p < .01$, $Odds Ratio = .006$, 95% CI [.001, .032]), but no significant effect for

¹² The results did not change when this participant was included.

construal level ($p = .87$) or a significant interaction effect ($p = .99$). In sum, participants in the stability-attribution condition were much less likely than participants in the unstable-attribution condition to indicate that the trustee had promised to do better in the future. This shows that our manipulation of attribution stability was successful.

Dependent variable. ANOVA with attribution stability and construal level as independent variables, and a willingness to allocate a critical task as a dependent variable, revealed no main effect of attribution stability ($F(1, 156) = .18, p = .68$) or construal level ($F(1, 156) = .24, p = .62$). The analysis did reveal the predicted attribution stability by construal level interaction effect ($F(1, 156) = 3.96, p = .048, \eta^2 = .03$). Figure 3 represents this interaction effect. Simple effects analyses revealed that, for low-construal-level trustors, an unstable attribution ($M = 2.28, SD = 1.26$) was significantly more effective than a stable attribution ($M = 1.77, SD = .96$) in restoring trust ($F(1, 156) = 3.32, p = .07, \eta^2 = .02$). For high-construal-level trustors, mean differences between stable ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.67$) and unstable attributions ($M = 1.97, SD = 1.38$) were not significant ($F(1, 156) = 1.10, p = .30$). These results support Hypothesis 3.

Figure 5.3 Effect of construal level mindset and stability attribution type on willingness to allocate a crucial task in Study 5.3. Error bars represent 95% CIs around the cell mean.



5.6 Discussion

The results presented here show that variations alongside attribution dimensions do affect trust, but only when the trustor construes the apology at a relatively concrete level (i.e. when he or she is in a low level construal mindset). Relative to trustors who were brought into high level construal mindsets, we showed that external, uncontrollable and unstable had a relatively positive effect on trustor trust, whereas internal, controllable and stable attributions had a relatively negative impact. In this way, our results show how trustor cognition, specifically trustor construal level mindset, determines the effect of attributions on trust responses.

Below we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings, as well as their strengths and limitations, and offer some suggestions for further research.

5.6.1 Theoretical implications

Our research represents a first step towards correcting an unfortunate and inadvertent consequence of attributional research on apologies: the overly passive image of the trustor that it has painted (Haselhuhn, Schweitzer, & Wood, 2010; Van Dijke & De Cremer, 2011). By considering the role of trustor construal level, our research establishes that antecedents on the part of the trustor can have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of an apology in restoring trust (see also Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). We are thus responding to numerous calls in the literature for a more flexible understanding of the maintenance of trust after a transgression (e.g., Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009; Kim et al., 2009). Our argument is, essentially, that trustee-side antecedents of trust promotion are social cues that may affect but do not determine the decision of the trustor to grant trust. In fact, we suggest in this chapter that a construal-level mindset on the part of the trustor is a crucial moderator that determines in what way an apology affects trust: conveying attributional information is only effective under low level construal. Under high level construal, we found no evidence for a role of attributions, suggesting that possibly the symbolic information conveyed by an apology – the apology being what we called a ‘gesture aimed at making amends’ – has more influence under those circumstances. In this way, this research can be considered part of the move towards a more dyadic notion of trust in interpersonal relations (Kim et al., 2009).

A further implication of this research for the literature on trust has to do with the finding that each of the three attribution dimensions in Weiner’s (1986) model affects trust after a transgression—at least under conditions of trustor low levels construal mindset. This suggests there is more than one road to reconciliation. In fact, given that attributions may vary anywhere along the three dimensions, there is an almost unlimited number of roads to take (that is: possible combinations). Interestingly, these roads seem to lead us at times in opposing directions. For instance, the promotion of trust via external attributions seems to work by

deflecting blame (i.e., I was not responsible for what happened). Uncontrollable attributions, however, deflect blame in a very different way - by restoring or (at least) doing no harm to the trustor's faith in the trustee's benevolence. This shows that even internal attributions do not need to harm trust as long as it can be credibly said that the cause of misfortune does not lie within the trustee's sphere of influence (i.e. "I could not help it from happening"). Even more remarkable than that, however, is the fact that the promotion of trust via unstable attributions actually works through the trustee's accepting blame while still managing to affect perceptions about the likelihood of future transgression. In other words, acknowledging that one committed a transgression but promising not to do it again already helps build or re-establish trust, and more so than if no promise is made. In this way, studying Weiner's (1986) complete attribution model yields unique insights into the dynamics of trust and trust promotion.

Finally, this research also extends our understanding of the interpersonal consequences of construal levels. Construal-level theory has mainly been applied to purely cognitive phenomena such as mental representation (Liberman & Förster, 2009) and to intra-personal phenomena such as self-control (Fujita & Roberts, 2010). Research on the interpersonal effects of construal levels is scarce (one example is McCrea et al., 2012). However, we are unaware of any other research showing that construal levels are relevant to interpersonal variables such as trust. We believe that the extension of construal-level theory to the trust domain is important, as it allows for a better understanding of how interpersonal processes are informed, and sometimes even determined, by cognitive processes that are properly located at either side of the dyad; construal levels can thus be used to better connect research at both these levels of analysis. By the same token, though, this research also carries implications for construal-level research as such. We have shown, for instance, that construal levels have implications outside the cognitive domain, the intrapersonal domain, or both, even for phenomena that were previously considered not to be primarily cognitive, such as trust (McAllister, 1995). Hence, interpersonal relations, person perception and evaluation, and especially trust are new and exciting domains in which to test construal-level theory.

5.6.2 Practical implications

A first, and intriguing, practical implication of our results is that they suggest two almost opposite avenues for transgressors to use an apology to restore trust. On the one hand, the results of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that deflecting blame by attributing causality to external causes or to causes beyond one's control is more effective than accepting blame. However, Study 3 suggests that even accepting blame can be effective in restoring trust as long as the trustee is able to credibly claim that the transgression will not be repeated in the future. Although our research did not address when one or another strategy is likely to be most effective, it is not unreasonable to believe that deflecting blame can be effective only when clear evidence for the responsibility for and the controllability of the transgression is missing (or when it is not clear where the responsibility lies). When one is clearly responsible for a transgression that one could have avoided, it stands to reason that accepting blame and stressing that the transgression will not occur again should be a more effective strategy.

A second practical implication of our results is that, regardless of the attributional strategies they follow, transgressors have only limited influence over the process of maintaining trust. As noted, variations along attribution dimensions are effective only among trustors with low-level construal – these variations, of course, are one of the few elements of the apology that trustees may control. Yet, certain factors of practical relevance are reliably associated with construal levels. Specifically the literature shows that temporal, spatial, and social distance and distance from reality (i.e., “hypotheticality”) affect construal levels in the sense that larger distances lead to higher levels of construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The same has been shown to be true for a high sense of power (Smith, & Trope, 2006). Our research indicates that the use of attributions is especially likely to be effective in influencing trust among low-level-construal trustors. This in turn suggests that attributions included with apologies are also particularly likely to be effective at relatively small distances between trustor and trustee, or when the trustor has a low sense of power. Thus, in relationships characterized by larger distances between trustee and trustor such as distal working relationships (Kiesler, &

Cummings, 2002), or relationships characterized by large power differences, the trustor may be likely to construe situations at higher levels of construal. In these cases, apologizing by referring to specific external, uncontrollable, or unstable factors is unlikely to make much of a difference.

5.6.3 Limitations and future directions

A trend in studying trust and apologies is to conduct research in the laboratory rather than in the field (Ferrin et al., 2007; Leunissen, et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2006; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). This is a trend into which our research seamlessly fits. Studying trust in the laboratory has several advantages, such as the high internal validity of findings. Moreover, the fact that trust is the result of complex social dynamics makes it quite difficult to devise field tests that will realize the effects we are after as effectively as we those we can devise in the laboratory. For this reason we chose to experimentally study the promotion of trust after a transgression. To maximize the external validity of our findings, however, we took care to create a realistic context in which transgressions and responses to it could be studied and to isolate essential processes. This is of course no replacement for a field study devoted to this subject. Additional research, both in the laboratory and in the field is therefore needed to support the external validity of our findings. A further challenge for additional research might be to test the effect of all eight types of attribution in one research design. Such a study might not only provide detailed information on the effects of each of the attribution dimensions, but all the same it might give information on the effects of the interplay between differences along the different dimensions of attributions.

One limitation of our research that should be addressed in future research is that, in our analysis of apologies, we considered only one type of transgression: a volitional moral lapse. Research has shown that trust, if unmanaged, is especially likely to suffer after such volitional lapses (Dirks & De Cremer, 2010) and that victims are most likely to desire an apology after such transgressions (Leunissen, et al., 2012). These features make the type of violation that we studied an important and interesting testing ground for our ideas. We believe, however, that our analysis can easily be extended to include non-volitional transgressions (what

others have called “competence violations”; Kim et al., 2004). Previous research has established that attributions may work differently in the context of such non-volitional transgressions. For certain types of non-volitional transgressions, accepting more rather than less blame may be an effective trust-promotion strategy, as it indicates the willingness and ability to change (Kim et al., 2006). We do not disagree with these results: they are entirely consistent with our analysis. However, we do note that this may mean that the effect of stability attributions is more substantial for non-volitional than for volitional transgressions.

A final suggestion for further research concerns our argument that the effect of apologies under high level is likely to be driven by the symbolic value of the apology (the apology being a symbolic gesture aimed at making amends, Schlenker, & Darby, 1990). Since our main interest in this chapter was to investigate construal level as an important boundary condition to the effect of attributions on trust, we did not directly test this assertion. One way to test this would be to investigate the effect of apology sincerity (see e.g. Schumann, 2012) under high vs. low level construal. Sincerity changes the symbolic value of the apology, as an insincere apology is not necessarily aimed at making amends. We encourage future research to take up this suggestion.

5.7 Conclusion

Trust is a necessary foundation for the establishment and maintenance of effective, long-term relationships of all kinds. Apologies can be an effective instrument to manage and maintain trust. Our research shows, however, shows that it is true in a more limited sense that previous research has suggested. While it is true that trustees may attribute misbehavior in various ways, and that these variations can differentially affect trust, attributions are only likely to have a substantial impact when trustors construe stimuli at relatively low levels. Our results underscore, thus, once again that trust maintenance, much like tango, takes (at least) two.

Chapter 6. General discussion: what have we learned and where to go now?

A scientifically acceptable definition of what morality is, is yet to be found (Joyce, 2006; Rai, & Fiske, 2011). This is as much a problem for a thesis like this one as it is a testament to the complexity of the moral domain (Haidt, & Kesebir, 2010). The moral domain is most likely populated by a tremendous and dazzling array of different types of drivers, cues and influences (including – but not exclusively – social influences, emotions and moral principles). Different drivers that, to make matters worse, may often push us in conflicting directions and may never fully agree with each other (Moon, 1993). When studying morality it is helpful to remind ourselves from time to time of that fact. In a way it is even slightly inaccurate to speak of ‘the moral domain’: It is implausible that there would be an identifiable and disparate part of social reality in which moral principles and rules have exclusive validity. The framework I have developed and applied here implies a different understanding: Our behavior is always the result of opposing forces and drivers, at least some which are almost always likely to be of a moral nature – such as moral norms or principles. This, I suggest, implies that studying the influence of moral rules, norms or principles should not only be a preferred pastime for moral psychologists. It is rather imperative to study human morality to be able to understand the motivations of our behaviors and decisions in general.

In this dissertation I add a piece to the puzzle by focusing on the fleetingness (i.e. uniqueness to a situation) or stability (i.e. consistency across situations) of drivers of moral behaviors. Many important conflicts in our lives are conflicts between the ‘pull’ of fleeting drivers and the ‘push’ of stable ones. Examples are not hard to come by: I should be working on this dissertation (a stable commitment), but the sun is out and I am craving a beer (a fleeting temptation). You might feel a strong attraction to a stranger at a party despite a commitment to a long-term partner. We might feel strong sympathy for a criminal who we know full well committed the crime. In all these cases acting upon a fleeting driver (an infatuation with a stranger, personal sympathies, a craving) may lead us to act in a different manner than acting upon our long-

term, stable, principles and commitments (a commitment to monogamy, moral rules and norms, the long-term interests of the group or dyads). We thus have to allocate influence between them, we simply cannot do both in these situations.

Evidently, people sometimes act on fleeting drivers. People cheat on their partners with total strangers, go out to enjoy the sunshine against their better judgment, act self-interestedly, condone behaviors that go against their moral principles and so on. But this is not always the case. People may also stay faithful, work despite plentiful opportunities for procrastination, reciprocate trusting behavior of an interaction partner or enforce moral principles. We are thus in need of a theoretical framework that is able to explain *both* why fleeting drivers may take precedence over stable ones *and* how the opposite maybe true as well. In this dissertation I have presented a framework that does exactly that.

I have shown that construal level is the cognitive mechanism that regulates the respective influence of fleeting and stable drivers on decision-making and behavior. Construal level is the level of abstractness or concreteness of our mental representations (Burgoon et al., 2013). High construal level allows one to disengage from the immediate context, and therefore focus on long-term and stable elements. Because of this, high construal level facilitates the expression of stable drivers in behavior, and low construal level facilitates the expression of fleeting drivers. This effect occurs because high construal level quells the influence of the fleeting drivers on our behavior and decision-making. Combined with that, it also allows long-term, stable, drivers to have a stronger influence on cognition. Low construal level, in contrast, allows for a relatively detailed focus on the 'here' and the 'now'. Because of this, it tends to quell the influence of stable, abstract, drivers and facilitate the expression of fleeting drivers. We might thus say metaphorically that low construal level's inherent focus on the details of the current situation 'crowds out' the influence of non-situational (i.e. stable) drivers.

Moral norms, rules and principles are by definition cross-situationally stable (Eyal, et al., 2008). In fact, there is a good argument to be made that moral principles would not be able to function as such if they would not display a certain consistency across situations. A principle that is only valid in one, unique, situation is hardly a principle in the first place (Habermas, 1988). Hence, we would typically expect high construal level to facilitate the expression of moral principles in behavior and decision-making. In line with this, high construal level is associated with *consistency* in (moral) behavior and decision-making. That is: high construal level makes people behave and decide similarly across situations (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). However, moral principles are not the only kind of drivers influencing our moral behavior. Other drivers may for instance be personal sympathies, certain emotions, pragmatic concerns and so on. These drivers are perhaps less evidently ‘moral’ but may yet drive us in different directions than unflinching moral principles proscribe. Often, albeit not always, such drivers are of a more fleeting nature. Low construal level facilitates their expression in decision-making and behavior. This leads to a more *flexible* decision-making style as well as behavior.

As an illustration, I have shown the regulative effect of construal level to play a role in punishment behavior in response to moral transgressions (see Chapter 3). In this chapter I posit that punishment can be driven by a motivation to enforce moral rules (a stable concern). Alternatively, various fleeting influences, such as short-term self-interest (Study 3.1) or perpetrator status (Study 3.2) have been shown to be able to motivate punitive behavior. I show here that these fleeting drivers have a stronger influence under low construal level, compared to under high construal level. High construal level, in contrast, is associated with a stronger influence of moral principles and thus more consistent punishment behavior. My other chapters deal with comparable processes related to cooperation and feeling trusted (Chapter 2), leader discipline (Chapter 4) and trust maintenance after a transgression by means of an apology (Chapter 5).

This framework, however, generalizes to any situation in which fleeting and stable drivers are at odds with each other. In this chapter I will discuss my findings as a whole. In order to do so, I will first briefly summarize my most important empirical results. Hereafter I will discuss some important theoretical and practical implications of my research as well as offer suggestions for further research.

6.1. A summary of the empirical findings

The central thesis of this dissertation is that construal level affects the weight or influence of both stable and fleeting drivers in decision-making and behavior. Low construal level increases the weight of fleeting drivers (relative to high construal level), whereas high construal level facilitates the influence of stable ones. There is an almost infinite amount of both fleeting and stable influences identifiable in the world. Studying all these influences in one research design would therefore be simply impossible. That is why I opted for another empirical strategy. Specifically, I selected a number of contexts in which the conflict between fleeting and stable drivers is especially poignant. Contexts in which, in other words, fleeting drivers affect us to behave in a way that clearly conflicts with the direction of influence of stable drivers. This allowed me to offer illustrations of the process around which my framework is built, without having to put unrealistic demands on my research design. Despite the variety of contexts, the general process I study and my theoretical framework does apply more generally. The framework can be used to arrive at meaningful predictions with regard to the relative influence of fleeting and stable drivers upon our behavior across a wide variety of contexts.

In my first empirical chapter, Chapter 2, I study the link between feeling trusted and cooperation. Feeling trusted is the understanding that an interaction partner perceives one as trustworthy (Lau, et al., 2014). Previous research has already associated feeling trusted with cooperation (e.g. Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Lau & Lam, 2008). However, in contrast to the related concept of trust, feeling trusted has only recently received some scholarly attention (Mikulincer, 1998; Lau, et al., 2007). Partly because of this, very little is

known about the process that links feeling trusted to cooperation. My theoretical framework sheds light on this question in the following way. Trust is generally defined as a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another without the possibility to monitor that other (Rousseau et al., 1998). This implies that feeling trusted can be seen as a dual-motive situation. In other words: it constitutes a dilemma. Given the interaction partner's vulnerability and unwillingness to monitor, it is likely to be more beneficial (in the short term) for an actor *not* to cooperate with the interaction partner, rather than to cooperate. After all, cooperation is by definition costly in the short term for the agent. Cooperation implies that one forgoes personal benefits in order to maximize pay-offs for the dyad or to the collective (De Cremer, et al., 2001). However, non-cooperation is likely to severely impair the quality of the relation with the interaction partner, especially if the interaction partner is trusting (Stevens, & Hauser, 2004). A low-quality relationship with an interaction partner spoils the opportunity to obtain long-term benefits from having a trusting relationship (Salamon, & Robinson, 2008). Additionally I may also harm the opportunity to obtain any reputational benefits (Castelfranchi, et al., 2006) – another potential long-term benefit.

In the terms introduced above, thus, the benefits of cooperation are *stable* drivers. Independent of the current situation, in the long term it is often more beneficial to cooperate than to not cooperate. The benefits of *not* responding cooperatively, in contrast, are *fleeting* drivers. In the current situation it is more beneficial to respond non-cooperatively. Bringing this all back to my overarching framework, thus, the influence of these short-term benefits of non-cooperation should be facilitates by low construal level. The influence of the long-term benefits of cooperation should be stronger under high construal level. I thus predicted that feeling trusted leads to cooperation, but mainly under high construal level.

This prediction was supported by two studies, using very different operationalizations and designs. In the first study, Study 2.1., I used a so-called 'trust-game paradigm' (Berg, et al., 1995). A trust game is a game in which two players, usually called 'Player 1' and 'Player 2', are coupled with each other to play a

collaborative game. Player 1 is given an endowment that he or she may decide to share wholly or partly with Player 2. In this case the original endowment was said to be \$ 1.-. All the money that is shared gets tripled. Hence, if Player 1 decided to share \$.50, Player 2 received \$ 1.50, if he or she decided to share \$ 1.-, Player 2 received \$ 3.- and so on. Given that Player 1, especially in the latter case, is dependent upon Player 2 to obtain his or her pay-off, transferring money is a trusting act. Previous research has shown that a transfer of less than the full endowment makes people feel as if they are not trusted by the interaction partner. Transferring the whole endowment, in contrast, makes people feel highly trusted (Malhotra, 2004; Pillutla, et al., 2003). In this study I allocated all participants to the Player 2 role and pre-programmed Player 1's decisions. In the high feeling trusted condition participants received the full endowment of Player 1 tripled (i.e. \$ 3.-). In the other condition participants received just half of the endowment of player 1, tripled (i.e. \$ 1.50). The proportion of the endowment of Player 2 given back to Player 1 was my outcome variable. This proportion can be seen as a sign of cooperation. Before participants made a decision about how much money to transfer back to Player 1, I induced either a low or a high construal level mindset (Freitas, et al., 2004). Results showed that people are more likely to cooperate after a signal of high trust (i.e. transfer of the full endowment), but only when brought in a high construal level mindset.

In the second study (Study 2.2) in this chapter I used a radically different research set-up. I also used different operationalization of key variables. This allowed me to show that these results can be generalized across contexts. I surveyed supervisors and subordinates in actual organizations. I asked the subordinates to indicate to what extent they felt trusted by their supervisor and I measured their dispositional construal level (Vallacher, & Wegener, 1989). I asked supervisors to indicate to what extent subordinates engaged in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs, Moorman, & Blakely, 1995). OCBs are typically extra-role behaviors that do not serve a direct interest of the employee, but nonetheless serve the organization (e.g. helping others, working unpaid overtime etc.). Because of this, they can be seen as a form of cooperative behavior (De Cremer, & Van Knippenberg, 2002). In line with the results of Study 2.1., this study showed a

positive relation between feeling trusted and the display of OCBs, but only for people dispositionally high in construal level.

Cooperation is not often studied by moral psychologists. This reluctance seems to reflect a division of labor within the sciences more than anything else. Indeed, I roughly defined the moral domain, in line with Haidt and Kesebir (2010), as the mechanisms that suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible. This definition implies that cooperation is the moral explanandum *par excellence*. The research reported in this chapter fits in a as of yet relatively small line of research (e.g. Brower et al., 2008; Lau & Lam, 2008; Lau et al., 2014; Salamon, & Robinson, 2008). The studies in this emergent tradition show that feeling trusted may often be crucial for optimal levels of cooperation to be reached. The implications for moral psychology of the findings presented in Chapter 2 are therefore twofold. First, I add to the emerging literature on feeling trusted by showing that feeling trusted allows for the suppression of self-interested behavior. Secondly, I am one of the first to recognize the role that construal level has to play here. I will discuss this latter point more extensively below. Taken together, these implications point to the fact that moral psychologists should pay more attention to the interplay between interpersonal phenomena, such as feeling trusted, and cognitive or interpersonal phenomena, such as construal level. Only then we will be able to fully understand how moral and immoral behaviors emerge.

My next two empirical chapters underscore this latter point even more. They do so in the context of negative reactions to other people's unethical behavior. In particular, in both chapters I focus on punitive (Chapter 3) or disciplinary reactions (Chapter 4) to moral transgressions. Punishment or discipline may be driven by moral convictions and the wish to enforce moral rules. As I remark above, moral principles tend to be *stable* drivers of behavior (Eyal et al., 2008). In line with my theoretical framework high construal level should thus facilitate the expression of moral norms and rules in punitive and disciplinary behavior. Under low construal level punishment decisions should be more likely to be driven by fleeting drivers present in the

situation. I tested this prediction in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I zoomed in on an ironic consequence of this. Low construal level allows for a focus on situational needs and affordances. Moral norms, in this case, are likely to appear to an agent as frustrating impediments to obtaining situational goals. Because of this, agents responsible for enacting disciplinary measures, specifically organizational leaders, are unlikely to be motivated to enforce moral rules under low construal level. Hence, construal level alters the perception of moral rules and norms. One worrying effect of this may be that these leaders are likely to react relatively leniently to moral transgressions of their followers.

Specifically, In Chapter 3 I wanted to show that punishment driven by fleeting motivations may lead to both more *lenient* as well as *harsher* forms of punishment (when compared to cross-situationally consistent forms of punitive behavior). I did so in three studies. First, in Study 3.1 I manipulated perpetrator status and induced either high or low construal level mindsets (Freitas et al., 2004). I argued that for an agent interested in enforcing moral rules perpetrator status should have less impact on punitive judgments, since status has no bearing on the gravity of the crime itself (Mazella, & Feingold, 1994). Yet, people have been shown to be swayed towards more leniency (low status) as well as harsher punishment (high status) because of perpetrator status information (e.g. Fragale et al., 2009). Perpetrator status thus is a fleeting driver in the sense that the same crime may be committed by perpetrators of different social standings. Results show that low level participants were affected by status information, such that they punished low status perpetrators more leniently than high status perpetrators. In the high construal level condition, however, there was no effect of perpetrator status on punitive decisions. In other words: I found flexible punishment in the low construal level conditions and consistent punishment in the high construal level conditions. Secondly, in Study 3.2 I studied the effect of punishment incentives for the punisher on punitive decision-making. In this condition it was actually in the leader's self-interest to punish a transgressing follower (there were no incentives to punish in the control condition). I found that punishment incentives drive punitive decisions under low, but not under high, construal level. Taken together, Studies 3.1 and 3.2 show that fleeting drivers that pertain to the

perpetrator (i.e. status information) as well as the punishing actor's side of the dyad (i.e. punishment incentives) may affect punitive behavior and decision-making, but mainly under low construal level. In both studies I used the procedure developed by Freitas and colleagues (2004) I also used in study 2.1 to induce a high or low construal level mindset.

In Study 3.3 I opted for a different approach. I asked employees of organization to indicate the cross-situational consistency (or inconsistency) of their supervisor's punitive behavior. I also measured supervisor's dispositional construal level and the how important they perceived moral rules and norms to be. This study again showed an effect of construal level on cross-situational consistent punishment: high construal level supervisors were judged to be more consistent than low construal level supervisors. This effect was found to be mediated by the importance of moral principles in decision-making: high construal level leaders indicated to be more inclined to use moral rules as guiding principles for decision-making than low construal level leaders.

In Chapter 4, I show that perceiving moral rules as guiding principles is typical for high construal level agents. Low construal level, in contrast, makes perceiving moral rules as frustrating impediments more likely. For instance, spouses may perceive their commitment to each other as a guideline permitting them to lead a certain kind of life. They may also experience it as a frustrating obstacle to engaging in extramarital intercourse. In much the same way leaders may perceive the set of moral norms, rules and principles that is upheld in an organization as a set of guidelines that permit them to make the right choices (Brown, & Treviño, 2006). Alternatively, they may experience these rules as frustrating obstacles to making the most of the situation (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007). One consequence of this is that under low construal level leaders are relatively unlikely to be motivated to enforce moral principles. When followers thus transgress moral norms, these leaders are therefore likely to avoid taking disciplinary action.

Three studies in Chapter 4 supported this prediction. In two laboratory studies, Studies 4.1 and 4.2, I used basically the same design. In both cases I invited participants in the lab and led them to believe that they would be working in the role of supervisors together with other participants, in the role of subordinates, on a collaborative task. I induced a high vs low construal level mindset, using a procedure developed by Freitas and colleagues (2004) in Study 4.1. In Study 4.2 I used another procedure developed by Lin and colleagues (1998; see also Fujita & Roberts, 2010). As a part of these latter procedures participants are asked to focus either on communalities or on differences between four exemplars in a set of stimuli (one set included, for instance, a t-shirt, a sandal, a high-heel shoe and a pair of jeans). We used four sets of stimuli in total. Communalities can be seen if exemplars are categorized in similar, overarching categories (e.g. a t-shirt and a pair of jeans are both items of clothing). Differences become apparent if we categorize exemplars in lower level categories (e.g. high-heels shoes are typically considered female footwear). Because of this, a focus on communalities invokes a high construal level mindset. A focus on differences, in contrast, invokes a low construal level mindset (Fujita, & Roberts, 2010).

Participants were then confronted with a transgressing subordinate. The subordinate claimed credit for work that should have been done by the team. In one condition, this subordinate did so intentionally and thus committed a moral transgression. In another condition the follower transgressed unintentionally – because he or she made a mistake. Unintentional transgressions are typically not seen as moral transgressions, and thus provided a baseline measurement. We did not find an effect of construal level in the unintentional transgression condition. However, remarkably, low construal level participants were relatively disinclined to respond in a disciplinary way to intentional transgression (both when compared to responses to unintentional transgression and when compared to high construal level participants). Results from the third study, Study 4.3, corroborated these findings in a field-setting. In this study I measured dispositional construal level of actual organizational leaders and asked them to recall an incident in which a follower transgressed either intentionally or unintentionally. Again, I found the same effect: low construal level leaders were relatively

lenient in response to intentional transgressions, whereas high construal level leaders enacted relatively strict disciplinary measures.

Taken together, the results of Chapter 3 and 4 provide important insight for the literature devoted to the psychological processes associated with interpersonal punishment (Henrich et al., 2006; Mendoza, Lane, & Amodio, 2014). Specifically, I bring together two important threats in these literatures. On the one hand, one threat in the literature has mainly focused on exploring moral, situationally invariable, influences on punishment (Carlsmith, 2002; Carlsmith et al., 2006; Rupp, & Bell, 2009; Skarlicki, & Kulik, 2004). On the other hand, another tradition has focused on pragmatic and situationally variable influences on punishment (Braun & Gollwitzer, 2012; Danziger, et al., 2011a;b; Hoogervorst, et al., 2010). Specifically, I show that both these kind of drivers have their place in punitive decision-making. Situationally invariable moral principles drive punitive behavior mainly under conditions of high construal level. Fleeting influences and pragmatic concerns are discounted under these circumstances. The reverse is true for low construal level.

My data do not allow me to say anything towards the relative effectiveness of both situationally consistent and flexible punishment styles. Additionally, analyzing the normativity of both is also beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet, it seems incontestable that responding with leniency to intentional transgressing followers sits uneasily with most tenets of responsible leadership theories, such as ethical leadership (Brown, & Treviño, 2006). Hence, low construal level may likely be associated with lower levels of ethical leadership ratings. Furthermore, punishing agents in society are expected to enforce norms and rules consistently while at the same time being flexible enough to be able to respond to exceptional cases (Simon, 1998; Treviño, 1992). If only because of that, a focus on punisher cognition is dearly needed. The research presented in these two chapters should be seen as a step in that direction.

Lastly, in Chapter 5 I turn to another possible reaction to another person's misbehavior: trust maintenance after a transgression in the form of an apology. Apologies are social accounts meant to restore

and maintain trust after a transgression. Apologies typically include a causal explanation of the transgression (i.e. an attribution) as well as a promise to do better in the future (Kim, et al., 2004). Processes that have been identified as being responsible for the trust restoring effect of an apology can be classified in roughly two categories. First, most recent research has based itself on an attributional analysis of apologies (see Kim et al., 2009 as well as Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009 for recent overviews of this literature). Attributions are argued to reduce causal uncertainty and help the addressee to make sense of the situation. In this way, attributions help to bring trust to stable levels again (Ferrin, et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006). Several studies show, for instance, how after a transgression of moral or social norms an attribution to a cause that is external to the perpetrator (e.g. another person or a circumstance) is more effective to restore trust than an internal attribution (to the perpetrator him or herself; Kim et al., 2004; Struthers et al., 2008). A relatively older stream of literature, however, has focused more profoundly on the symbolic value of apologies. In this literature apologies are typically seen as symbolic gestures aimed at making amends (e.g. Nichols, 1990; Schlenker, & Darby, 1981).

The symbolic value of any apology is similar across apologies, but attributions may differ. Attributions are thus *variable* elements of the apology, the symbolic connotation is a *stable* element. In fact, according to Weiner's (1986) influential attribution model, in fact, apologies may differ alongside three dimensions: locus of causality (i.e. internal or external to the actor), controllability and stability. Because of this variability of attributions, I argued that low construal level should facilitate the effect of attributions on addressee trust. This leads to flexibility in granting trust after an apology has been issued. In contrast, the effect of attributions is quelled by high construal level. This implies a focus on the symbolic value of the apology and thus more consistency across apologies in terms of granting trust.

Three experimental studies supported this reasoning. In each study I manipulated attributions to vary along one of Weiner's (1986) three dimensions while keeping the other two stable. For instance, in Study 5.1 all participants received an apology that contained an attribution that was both controllable and unstable. The

attribution was, however, internal in one condition, and external in the other. In Study 5.2 participants received an apology containing a controllable or uncontrollable attribution that was both internal and unstable. In Study 5.3 participants received an apology that contained an internal and controllable attribution in both conditions, but which differed in levels of stability across conditions. In all three studies I induced construal level mindsets by using two different established procedures to do so (Freitas et al., 2004, Studies 5.1 and 5.3; Lin et al., 1998, Study 5.2). Results showed that attributions do affect the trust of the addressee of the apology. External, uncontrollable and unstable attributions were found to be more effective than internal, controllable and stable attributions, respectively. I only found this effect, however, when addressees of the apology were brought into low construal level mindsets. This suggests that attributions are relatively concrete, fleeting and low level elements of an apology.

In Chapter 5 I synthesize two strands in the apology literature. Much recent literature has suggested that the trust restoring effect of apologies is mainly due to attributions (e.g. Kim et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Leunissen et al., 2014; Struthers et al., 2008). Older literature that focused more strongly on the symbolic understanding of apologies (De Cremer et al., 2010; Desmet, et al., 2011; Nichols, 1990; Schlenker, & Darby, 1981). My analysis implies that both attributional processes as well as the symbolic connotation of apologies play a role in trust maintenance. They do so under different circumstances, though. Attributions mainly drive trust restoration when addressees construe stimuli, including apologies, at relatively low levels. High construal level, however, impedes this effect. In other words: for attributions in apologies to affect trust, addressees must have a detailed focus and differentiate between different types of attributions. Furthermore, the research reported here also extends research on the role of attributions in apologies. Specifically, I am the first to include *all* of Weiner's (1986) attribution dimensions rather than just one, as in much previous research (locus of causality, e.g. Ferrin et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2006). Even though variations on these dimensions may all have impact on trust, they affect trust in decidedly different ways. For example, external attributions amount to a denial of involvement. Unstable attributions, in contrast, imply taking

responsibility but promising to do better in the future. To understand apologies more fully it is thus imperative to study variations alongside all these dimensions.

To reiterate, in this dissertation I studied moral behaviors in contexts in which fleeting drivers conflict with stable ones. I investigated how such conflicts may be resolved. For instance, in the short-term non-cooperation is more attractive to an agent than cooperation, especially when one feels trusted. However, in the long-term this impairs the quality of the relationship with the interaction partner (Chapter 2). Stable, moral concerns, drive us to punish moral transgressions relatively harshly and consistently across condition, but a focus on the affordances of the situation and situational drivers may lead us towards leniency and flexibility (Chapters 3 and 4). Apologies are symbolic gestures that invite us to grant trust, but attributions may make us think again (or even to be more willing to restore trust). In all these cases, I have shown that the effect of long-term stable drivers (long-term relational benefits in Chapter 2, moral concerns in Chapters 3 and 4, the symbolic connotation of an apology in Chapter 5) is facilitated by high construal level. In contrast, the effect of fleeting drivers (short-term self-interest in Chapter 2, pragmatic concerns in Chapter 3, situational reasons to punish in Chapter 4, attributions in Chapter 5) was shown to be facilitated by low construal level.

What this shows is that while the precise nature of both the fleeting and the stable drivers depends on the context we study, the general processes remain the same. Construal level affects the relative weight of both fleeting and stable drivers in decision-making. Stable drivers have a stronger influence for high levels of construal and fleeting ones for low levels. In its strongest form my argument thus implies that we would find similar results in any context in which relatively fleeting drivers drive us into one direction and relatively stable ones drive us into another.

In the next section I will discuss the broader theoretical implications of these findings.

6.2. Theoretical implications

The implications of these results, taken together, speak to at least two different literatures. On the one hand, my findings have significant implications for the moral psychology (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Graham & Haidt, 2011) and behavioral ethics (De Cremer, Van Dick, Tenbrunsel, Pillutla, & Murnighan, 2011; Schminke, 2001) literatures. On the other hand, several implications are also interesting from the perspective of the study of construal levels (Burgoon et al., 2013; Trope, & Liberman, 2010). In this section I will discuss implications for both these literatures in turn.

6.2.1. Implication for moral psychology and behavioral ethics

I am definitely not the first to focus on conflicts between fleeting and stable drivers as a key to understand morality. In fact, already for many ancient Greek philosophers *akrasia*, or willpower, was the central force making moral action possible (Kraut, 2014; Stroud, 2014). *Akrasia*, at least on some readings, was understood as the ability to overcome fleeting temptations and act upon long-term stable commitments (Davidson, 1970; Rorty, 1997). We still see traces of this way of thinking in modern conceptualizations of human moral behavior. A case in point is the definition of morality that Haidt and Kesibir (2010) offer that I quote in my introduction above. According to this definition the ability to overcome the temptation to act selfishly is central to morality (see also Baumeister & Exline, 1999). In general, we can say that in its basic structure a temptation is a conflict between the pull of fleeting drivers and the push of stable ones. This is true for relatively mundane temptations, such as the temptation to indulge in unhealthy snacks despite having a long-term goal to eat healthily. It is also true for more clearly moral ones, such as the temptation to exploit an interaction partner who trusts us (a situation I analyze in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Hence, my overarching framework should apply in all these cases: high construal level should be associated with more self-control and low construal level with a stronger tendency to give in to temptations. Research conducted

by Fujita and colleagues (e.g. Fujita, & Carnevale, 2012; Fujita, & Han, 2008; Fujita, & Roberts, 2010) does indeed indicate that this is the case.

A first implication of my findings is, thus, that they provide converging evidence that high construal level is associated with stronger forms of self-control (Fujita, 2011). I am, however, one of the first to extend this way of thinking into the moral domain. Fujita's studies have, in contrast, generally focused on more traditional self-control contexts, such as dieting (see Fujita & Roberts, 2010 for a typical example). In any case, my research and that of Fujita and his co-authors are both based on the presumption that in any one situation several, possibly conflicting, drivers may exert influence on our behavior and decision-making. Construal level is the mechanism that allows for certain drivers to get expressed in behavior (e.g. stable ones under high construal level, fleeting ones under low construal level), whilst quelling the influence of other types. One implication of this is that when someone typically construes things at relatively low levels, he or she is unlikely to be strongly influenced by stable drivers. Yet, this does not exclude the possibility that (s)he feels committed to certain stable goals. To illustrate: it is conceivable that an actor holds a commitment to certain stable moral principles or goals (e.g. being kind or acting with integrity) but will yet be unlikely to act on these due to the influence of situational drivers of behavior. Acting on fleeting drivers may thus stand in the way of reaching stable goals in much the same way that a dieter may be committed to the goal to lose weight may yet be unable to withstand the temptation of indulging in unhealthy snacks (Fujita, 2011). Hence, my results illustrates that one reason why people may be inclined to act in ways they themselves consider immoral or undesirable is that they may lack the required cognitive capacity to disengage from the lure of certain fleeting temptations.

In addition to this, my research goes beyond this focus on temptations and indicates that there is more to morality than the ability to withstand momentary lures. My arguments and findings actually imply that temptations are subclass of a broader set of contexts in which fleeting and stable drivers conflict. That is:

temptations are precisely that class in which acting upon stable drivers is considered more normatively appropriate or socially desirable (Freitas, Liberman, & Higgins, 2001). This is not always the case. In many instances, acting in accordance to stable drivers does not necessarily lead to more desirable behaviors. For instance, it is not necessarily 'better' to disregard attributional information in an apology (see Chapter 5). Even enforcing moral rules and norms disregarding situational circumstances may be undesirable, when exceptional circumstances (typically fleeting drivers) are encountered (Chapter 3). Yet, both trust maintenance as well as punishment are important ways that social behavior is regulated and are thus important phenomena to study from a moral psychological perspective (Bekoff, 2004; Karremans, & Van Lange, 2004). This has two important implications. First, moral psychologists should extend their studies to also include non-temptational contexts in which fleeting and stable drivers conflict. Secondly, in line with this, other mechanisms that also have found to play a role in resisting temptation (or not), such as devaluation of alternative options (Johnson, & Rusbult, 1989) or regulatory fit (Freitas et al., 2001), may also play a role in dealing with non-temptations.

My findings also hold significance for scholars studying interpersonal dynamics within social collectives (such as organizations). All behaviors I studied here are, in different ways, important for the effective functioning of social collectives. In fact, all these behaviors may even be instrumental in making social life possible in the first place (for feeling trusted see Salamon & Robinson, 2008, for discipline and punishment Fehr, & Gächter, 1999; for forgiveness Karremans, & Van Lange, 2004). Indeed my first empirical chapter, Chapter 2, makes clear how cooperation *itself* can be conceptualized as a mixed motive situation, particularly in the context of felt trust. Cooperation it is likely to be beneficial in the long-term, but risky and costly in the short term (Lind, & Tyler, 1988). More or less 'by default', thus, we would expect high construal level to promote cooperation and low construal level to impede cooperative behaviors. This, thus, would make it seem as if high construal level is to be preferred from a social perspective. After all, high

construal level should be associated with more cooperation and pro-social behavior (but see Wolpin, et al., 2011). However, I suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

One reason for this is that morality is quite definitely too complex to be satisfactorily reduced to a simple dichotomy in which one side is considered to be 'better' than the other (Rai, & Fiske, 2011). My results do give at least some reason to doubt an automatic association between high construal level and more morally (or, at least, socially) desirable behaviors. For instance, as I suggest in Chapter 3, mindlessly enforcing of moral rules without considering possible exceptions sits uneasily with many normative theories on this point (e.g. Flew, 1954). This may also not be optimal from the perspective of the social collective (Podsakoff et al., 1982). Rather, in these and in other cases it seems that reaching optimal levels of cooperation requires actors to balance moral concerns with other types of concerns (De Cremer, & Van Knippenberg, 2002; DeDreu, & McCusker, 1997). I have argued here that construal level regulates precisely that balancing act. My findings thus indicate that construal level has important implications in determining moral behavior and moral decision-making that go beyond the level of the individual or even the dyad.

In this dissertation I opted to study moral *behaviors*, rather than moral evaluations or judgments. Moral evaluation research has been the dominant paradigm in current-day moral psychological research (Abend, 2012). Typically, in these studies participants are asked to evaluate certain relatively unrealistic but morally contentious scenarios (e.g. consensual sibling incents, Haidt & Björklund, 2008, or the permissibility of using a fat man to stop an out of control trolley on its way to kill five others, Bloom, 2011). This approach to studying the psychology of morality has been argued to be problematic for several reasons (Abend, 2012). For one thing, there is more to morality than just moral evaluations (Abend, 2008). Additionally, the relation between moral evaluations obtained in the lab and actual behaviors tends to be relatively weak (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Pelletier, & Mongeau, 1992). More substantially, using such a set-up it is hard (perhaps even impossible) to model the fact that people may hold several aims at once (e.g. both moral and practical

ones). In the typical study participants are first confronted with a certain manipulation (e.g. the absence or presence of incidental disgust, see Schnall, et al., 2008 for an example) and then given the opportunity to evaluate a moral vignette. Any difference in evaluations is then post-hoc associated with the manipulation. This leaves little, if any, room for meaningful agentic action. Perhaps because of this, moral psychology has been argued to underestimate the possibility for human moral agency (e.g. Lavazze & DeCaro, 2010). After all, in this kind of research set-up virtually no other drivers apart from the manipulation are available for the participant to base any evaluation on (Abend, 2008). This is in striking contrast with real life in which almost always several types of drivers will be available to the actor to use as a guide for behavior or evaluation. What matters, then, is not only to find out what kinds of drivers affect moral evaluations as well as moral behavior. It is also important to understand what determines the relative influence of these different types of drivers. The typical set up of moral psychological research only suboptimally allows for this. With this research I hope to have set one step towards resolving this issue in moral psychological research.

Particularly, my arguments and results point to the importance of mechanisms regulating the situational sensitivity of cognition in affecting the impact of situational (i.e. fleeting) and cross-situational stable drivers upon behavior and decision-making. Studying mechanisms that allow the actor to transcend the influence of the immediate situation has, in fact, been identified as one of the most important issues within social psychology several decades ago (Lewin, 1951). It has nonetheless yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves (Galinsky, et al., 2008). In social psychology in general, and moral psychology in particular, the person has essentially been depicted as a victim of fleeting situational forces, such as incidental emotions (Schnall et al., 2008), group memberships (Koleva, Selterman, Iyer, Ditto, & Graham, 2013) and brain functions (Greene et al., 2001). Because of this, a person is presumed to be never able to understand, let alone change, what truly drives his or her (moral) evaluations and behaviors (see Abend, 2008; 2012; Lavazze, & De Caro, 2012 for similar arguments). My research paints a more nuanced picture: I suggest that fleeting forces may indeed determine moral behaviors, but not necessarily so. According to construal level theory,

cognitive abstraction implies quite literally taking a ‘step back’ from the current situation to focus on more stable commitments and drivers. Because of this, it is a mechanism that mutes the influence of the situation and facilitates the expression of stable drivers in behavior. Of course, this does not necessarily lead to more morally preferable outcomes. What it does show, however, is that even within modern-day naturalistic psychology there is space for some form of (moral) agency.

A last implication of this research for moral psychology – as well as a first one for the construal level literature – has to do with the conflicting findings within the construal level literature as regards the implications of construal level for moral evaluations (Eyal, & Liberman, 2010). Certain studies (Ägerström, & Björklund, 2009a;b; Eyal et al., 2008) show more extreme moral approbation of immoral behaviors and stronger praise for morally laudable ones. These results have proven hard to replicate (Gong, & Medin, 2012), however. Additionally, the argument that moral principles have a stronger influence on moral decision-making (Eyal et al., 2008) implies an association between principle-based morality and high construal level (see also Chapter 5). Other studies, however, actually show an association between high construal level and outcome-based morality (a form of morality which is sometimes contrasted to principle-based morality, see Lammers & Stapel, 2008; Aguilar, Brussino, Fernández-Dols, 2013).

My framework suggests that this confusion may be due to an improper modeling of the influence of stable as well as fleeting drivers. For example, both outcome-based as well as principle-based moralities are, in fact, based on relatively cross-situationally stable rules (Broeders, Van den Bos, Müller, & Ham, 2011). Hence, given my framework, construal level should facilitate the influence of both, probably depending on the context and personal preferences. Similarly, as I show in the second empirical chapter of this dissertation (i.e. Chapter 3), people may be driven towards both *more* as well as *less* disapproval of moral transgressions by fleeting drivers. Hence, it seems implausible to claim that high construal level will always, under any circumstance, be associated with stronger disapproval of morally contentious acts. My arguments imply that

we can fully understand the influence of construal level on moral evaluations only when we properly understand the type of drivers in a given situation, especially in terms of their relative fleetingness or stability. Regretfully, most research in this area has up to now failed to do so.

6.2.2 Implications for construal level research

Construal level has up to now been predominantly studied in the cognitive (see e.g. Maglio, & Trope, 2012) and intrapersonal (e.g. Fujita, 2011) domains. From a construal level perspective, thus, the main importance of this set of studies lies in the fact that I apply construal level to quintessential interpersonal processes. These processes include feeling trusted (Chapter 2), trust maintenance (Chapters 5) and punishment (Chapter 3 and 4). My studies therefore answer to numerous calls in the literature for more work focusing on the interpersonal effects of construal level (e.g. Popper, 2013; Trope, & Liberman, 2010).

My arguments and findings imply that construal level is highly relevant for interpersonal processes such as the ones I have studied. This is not only true for the specific situations I have studied in this dissertation. The relevance of my framework extends even beyond situations that have a clear moral element. In fact, my framework should apply to any situation in which fleeting and stable drivers affect (social) behaviors. An often studied example is the case in which interaction partners have to exert effort in order to reach a common goal. This situation is of course highly relevant from an organizational perspective. In such cases there is a well-known tension between the drive to reach the goal and the unwillingness to exert more effort than the rest of the group ('the sucker effect', Schnake, 1991). My framework would suggest that the former drive would be facilitated by high construal level and the latter impeded, whereas low construal level is likely to have the opposite effect. After all, a common goal is generally relatively generalized and abstract. The effort exerted by other group members, in contrast, is highly situational. Hence, the sucker effect should be more likely under low construal level. This is but one example of how my framework can be extended to cover a large set of situations. More in general, my research shows how construal level theory can be

extended towards the interpersonal and moral domains. Such an extension should be able to yield valuable insights.

My findings also carry important implications for the study of social dilemmas and integrative negotiations (see also Giacomantino et al., 2010). In social dilemma's people have typically to weigh the need to contribute to a common pool (or in the case of common good dilemma's: the need to harvest below the replenishment rate, Batson, Batson, Todd, Brummett, Shaw, & Aldeguer, 1995) with the risk of being taken advantage from (Kerr, 1983). In the long term contributing (or harvesting relatively little) is more beneficial for both the individual as well as the collective. In the short term, however, contributing little (or harvesting much) is more beneficial for the individual, if only to prevent being taken advantage of by other players (De Cremer, et al., 2001). In line with my analyses above – especially those offered in Chapter 2 – it is quite clear that construal level should play a role here. My arguments imply that high construal level should be associated with increased contribution (harvesting little) when compared to low construal level (but see Wolpin, et al., 2011). Similarly, we would expect low construal level to be associated with higher default rates. In integrative negotiation there is a similar tension between negotiator self-interest and finding optimal solution for all parties involved (Giacomantino et al., 2010). Construal level theory and my framework are thus also very relevant here (see Henderson, Trope, & Carnevale, 2006 for a more extensive argument on this point).

Secondly, in this thesis I operationalize and study construal level as the cognitive mechanism that *determines* the relative importance of both fleeting and stable drivers on behavior and decision-making (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). This effect is well-established in the literature and an essential part of the theory (Fiedler, 2007; Ledgerwood, Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 1998). However, most studies of construal level have focused on studying antecedents, rather than the consequences, of construal level (Nussbaum, et al., 2003; Henderson, et al., 2011; Todorov, et al., 2007). More often than not, in such cases, differences levels of construals are inferred – rather than measured – from the presence or absence of certain antecedents. To

illustrate, in many studies high construal level is inferred from stimuli being presented at large distances (see e.g. Trope, & Liberman, 1998; Eyal et al., 2008 or Smith, & Trope, 2006 for typical examples). This approach has been criticized on the grounds that even though there is a tight relation between construal levels and (psychological) distance or proximity, distance is a broad concept whose effects cannot all be reduced to construal level (Williams, & Bargh, 2008). There is thus a need in the literature to focus on studying construal level itself, apart from its well-known antecedents. Additionally, scholars should try to better differentiate between effects of construal level and effects of antecedents, such as distance and power (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). The research presented here represents a step in this direction.

Lastly, there is a need in construal level research to focus more strongly on behavior (Burgoon et al., 2013). An impressive range of topics that have been covered by construal level research – from self-control (Fujita, 2011) to activity enactment (Trope, & Liberman, 1998) and from person perception (McCrea, et al., 2012) to categorization (Rim et al., 2009). However, most of the outcome measures used have been either attitudinal (see e.g. Fujita et al., 2008), attributional (Nussbaum, et al., 2003) or intentional (e.g. Eyal et al., 2009). This is problematic, if only because the link of attitudes and intentions with behavior remains spurious (Vallerand et al., 1992). My framework implies that the motivational effect of fleeting drivers on behavior is facilitated by low construal level (leading to flexible forms of behavior) and the effect of stable drivers by high construal level (leading to consistency). In this way, my thesis is conducive to this move towards a focus on behavior (see Conway, & Peetz, 2012 and Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012 for comparable approaches).

6.3. Suggestions for future research

Future research should be aimed at expanding the framework I have presented here in at least two directions. First, we know very little, as of yet, of the long-term effects of dispositional differences in construal level (Burgoon et al., 2013). My research shows that construal level is involved in the ability to be able to act on long-term aims or stable commitments. It is therefore important to investigate how construal levels affects

the ability to pursue and reach such long-term goals, commitments or ideals over the longer term (Kivetz, & Tyler, 2007). More important may even be to investigate whether it is possible to lastingly affect construal levels over longer periods of time. Secondly, other mechanisms than construal level may be likely to affect the relative weight of fleeting and stable concerns in decision-making and behavior as well. Future research should focus on these alternative mechanisms. Both these avenues hold special significance for moral psychology. In this section I will discuss both directions for future research in turn.

6.3.1. Long-term effects of construal level

Construal level can be seen both as a trait (see e.g. Vallacher, & Wegener, 1989) and a state (Liberian, & Trope, 2008). Despite that, construal level research has up to now overwhelmingly focused on relatively short-lived effects of (state) construal level (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010; Rim, et al., 2009; Trope, & Liberman, 1998). In most – albeit not all (Studies 2.2, 3.3 and 4.3) – of my studies I have also operationalized and manipulated construal level as a state variable. However, my arguments imply that high construal level is instrumental, perhaps crucial, for the ability to immunize oneself to the press of the immediate situation (Galinsky, et al., 2008). High construal level therefore allows for a focus on stable, long-term, drivers of behavior. Examples of such stable drivers are long-term personal goals or long-term commitments. It thus stands to reason that (trait) high construal level should facilitate (and low construal level should impede) the pursuit of long-term goals. Additionally, high construal level should be conducive in resolving self-discrepancy (i.e. the ‘distance’ between actual and ideal selves, Higgins, 1987). After all, constantly pursuing one’s short-term interests may well stand in the way of obtaining long-term valued outcomes. For instance, as per Chapter 2, a person who responds exclusively non-cooperatively to trust signals may be unable to ever obtain long-term relational benefits from having trusting relationships with interaction partners. Future research is therefore advised to focus more on studying trait-level construal level in addition to state-level, especially in the context of long-term goal attainment (Sheldon, 2014).

If it is the case that high construal level allows for more effective long-term goal pursuit and (moral) self-development, obviously the question whether it is possible to lastingly affect construal level on the long-term becomes important. After all, promoting high construal level would in this case allow people to more effectively pursue their personal or collective goals and commitments. Additionally, it might also (as per Chapter 2 of this thesis) promote cooperation within social collectives. Regretfully, at this moment we know next to nothing as regards the possibility to affect construal level over the long-term. Because of this, more studies should be developed aimed at developing techniques to do precisely that (affect trait-level construal level) over the long-term. Studies that use longitudinal designs as well as other designs that allow us to gauge long-term effects of interventions are especially dearly needed.

A focus on how construal level may facilitate long-term goal pursuit, specifically in the moral domain, may help moral psychology to move away from an overreliance on moral evaluation studies (Abend, 2008). Important as these studies may have been, it has been argued that moral psychologists have hereby implicitly restricted themselves to a so-called ‘thin’, or axiomatic understanding of morality (Abend, 2012; Hitlin, & Vaissey, 2013). A thin understanding of morality is based on the presumption that the whole of the moral domain can be exhaustively described in terms of ‘thin’, that is: purely evaluative, concepts, such as right/wrong, appropriate/inappropriate (Williams, 1985; 1995). Several venerable traditions in moral philosophy do not subscribe to this notion, or find it outright laughable (Abend, 2008). These ‘thick’ traditions, of which virtue ethics (Alfano, 2013) is the most well-known, typically emphasize the importance of ‘thick’ concepts. ‘Thick’ concepts are concepts that are both descriptive as well as evaluative (e.g. kindness, virtuous, integrity and so on). ‘Thick’ moral concepts typically refer to behaviors that are the result of, or part of, moral practice and self-development (e.g. virtuous behavior) – with, in other words, the ability to pursue long-term moral goals. Precisely this ability should be facilitated by high construal level. This stands in sharp contrast to ‘thin’ moral concepts, which are not necessarily affected by practice (see Abend, 2008 for a more extensive analysis).

'Thick' moral thinking has played an important role in the development of moral philosophy (Alfano, 2013). However, investigating the psychology of 'thick' moral concepts has virtually been neglected by moral psychologists (Hitlin, & Vaissey, 2013). This neglect is arguably at least partly responsible for the rather un-agentic understanding of the moral person that has been argued to plague moral psychology (Lavazze, & De Caro, 2010). Focusing on the long-term effects of trait construal level in terms of long-term goal pursuit and self-development might therefore constitute a step towards addressing these important issues.

6.3.2. Other relevant concepts

Construal level is likely to be an important, perhaps crucial, factor determining the relative weight that fleeting and stable drivers get in influencing decision-making and behavior. However, it is unlikely to be the only factor to affect this balance between fleeting and stable drivers. One particularly interesting other concept, for instance, is the related but different concept of self-construal abstractness (Updegraff, & Suh, 2007; Updegraff, Emanuel, Suh, & Gallagher, 2010). Self-construal abstractness is the extent in which the concept of the self is decoded in relatively abstract terms (e.g. "I am a kind person") or relatively concrete terms (e.g. "I am the kind of person who helps out in the homeless shelter every Friday night"; Updegraff, & Suh, 2007). A relatively abstract understanding of the self allows for more different strategies to affirm the self and is less easily disconfirmed (Updegraff, et al., 2010). Because of this, abstract self-construals have been shown to be related with both high self-esteem and higher life satisfaction judgments (Updegraff et al., 2010).

In the terms introduced here, this implies that abstract self-construals are less easily affected by (negative) fleeting cues. For instance, the proposition "I am a likeable person" (a relatively abstract construal of the self) is still in line with the facts even if one is rejected by a potential interaction partner. In contrast, the proposition "I am well-liked by every person I meet" (a relatively concrete understanding of the self), is not. Hence, people who have a relatively abstract understanding of the self are better able to navigate social reality without paying too much attention to relatively inconsequential negative details. A relatively abstract

understanding should thus allow an agent to disengage from peripheral and fleeting cues and focus on more stable drivers that are important to the agent. Abstract self-construal may arguably play a role comparable to that of construal level described in this thesis, at least in domains relevant for understandings of the self. It stands to reason, for instance, that an abstract understanding of the self facilitates the expression of long-term personal goals and moral values in behavior. Future research should explore this more fully.

Lastly, a host of factors, including having power (Galinsky et al., 2008), positive affect (Frijda, 1988) and trust (Boon & Holmes, 1991) has been associated with the ability to disengage from the immediate situation. These factors, bar trust (but see Henderson, et al., 2011), have already been associated with construal level (for power, see Smith, & Trope, 2006, for positive affect, see Pyone, & Isen, 2011). The nature of these relationships (i.e. causal or correlational) is as of yet unclear, however (Anderson, & Brion, 2013). What these factors also have in common is that they are all associated with a relative lack of threats in the environment. Having power (as opposed to having no power) implies that one is less dependent upon others, which makes for less risk in the environment (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Positive affect is generally thought to signal non-threatening circumstances (Frijda, 1988). Trust implies that one expects an interaction partner not to take advantage of oneself (Rousseau et al., 1985). High construal level has similarly been linked with the absence of threat (Förster, & Dannenberg, 2010). The presence or absence of threat may thus offer an integrative framework to understand how and why fleeting and stable drivers affect behavior. Fleeting influences are more likely to take hold under threatening circumstances (e.g. low power, low trust, negative affect and so on). Stable drivers are more likely to steer behaviors in non-threatening circumstances (e.g. high power, high trust, positive affect etc.). We may speculate that this is adaptive: under threat vigilance in responding to (potentially dangerous) fleeting drivers is required (De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008). In such circumstances, any fleeting driver may potentially spell danger. Few things are more fleeting than a predator's attack. Under conditions of low threat fleeting drivers maybe more safely ignored. One particularly interesting implication of this is that acting on stable drivers – such as moral principles – can be understood as

somewhat of a luxury not afforded to those under threat. Future research is advised to investigate these suggestions.

6.4. Practical implications

The research reported here mainly has implications for the regulation of interpersonal relations within social collectives, such as organizations. As I already stated, all my empirical chapters ultimately have to do with factors and phenomena that make social life possible (Fehr, et al., 2002; Struthers et al., 2008). Chapter 2, which is related to the relation between feeling trusted and cooperation, may seem to imply that high construal level is desirable for all members of a social collective. My other three empirical chapters, however, paint a more nuanced image. In Chapters 3 and 4, I study different styles of enacting discipline (i.e. pragmatic vs. principled) and punishment (i.e. flexible vs. consistent). In both chapters I argue that there are good reasons to believe that in most instances agents need to weigh several needs (i.e. pragmatic vs moral concerns; the need to enforce rules consistently across situations with the need to flexibly respond to certain circumstances) against each other. Similarly, in Chapter 5, which is related to trust maintenance, I argue that neither granting forgiveness without regard for the circumstances, or, on the other hand, solely basing oneself on circumstantial factors is likely to be optimal. Hence, a first practical implication is that social actors should be aware of the fact that their construal level affects how they respond to both stable and fleeting drivers. This allows them to not to become prisoners, as it were, of neither their immediate situation nor of principles, rules or norms.

Secondly, my framework implies that people may be motivated by several, possibly conflicting, long-term and short-term drivers at once. The relative influence of all those drivers on behavior is determined by construal level. This implies that acting on short-term, fleeting, drivers may stand in the way of obtaining long-term goals. But it also implies the opposite: acting upon long-term goals may be an obstacle to obtain short-term aims. Above I give the example of the person who because of his or her inclination to act in

accordance with fleeting drivers tends to respond non-cooperatively to trusting signals of interaction partners. It is likely that this obstructs the possibility to build long-term trusting relationships with virtually any interaction partner – even if he or she would be committed to the long-term aim to do so. Similarly, in my discussion of my Chapter 4 I suggested that it is conceivable that a leader has a long-term commitment to sustaining the moral climate in an organization, but yet condones immoral behaviors. Hence, in practice, actors should be aware of the phenomenon that focusing short-term drivers may ‘crowd out’ long-term ones. Consciously affecting one’s construal level (i.e. engaging in cognitive abstraction) may be a way to deal with this issue.

Thirdly, these studies taken together show that retaining employees with predominantly (trait-level) low levels of construals will likely invoke substantially different patterns of behavior than retaining employees with relatively high (trait) levels of construal. For instance, low construal level employees are more likely to respond to management techniques that rely on using situational drivers in order to motivate certain behaviors. Examples of these are conditional rewards or punishments (Podsakoff et al., 1982; Podsakoff, et al., 2006). On the other hand, high construal level is likely associated with a stronger focus on the long-term needs of the collective as a whole. It should also be connected to a higher likelihood to respond to certain social cues in cooperative manner (when compared to low construal level). Additionally, high construal level is associated with a stronger tendency to base behavior on moral norms and principles. This implies that high construal level employees may be less likely to be corrupted by a toxic environment than low construal level employees (Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005). Hence, organizations that need a relatively high level of independence and incorruptibility of employees (e.g. professional service firms) are advised to select for high construal level employees. In contrast, organizations that rely on manipulating situational factors as a way to manage employee behavior may be advised to hire mostly employees with dispositionally relatively low (trait) levels of construal.

6.5 Concluding remarks

I do not have the illusion that this chapter or even this dissertation has made navigating life with moral principles in mind any easier for anybody. In fact it quite possible that I have made that harder. On several occasions I have argued that acting on stable drivers does not necessarily makes one more ‘moral’. Similarly, acting on fleeting ones does not necessarily mean that one is likely to behave in an undesirable or immoral fashion. There is therefore no easy advice or principle to be distilled from this thesis. If anything my research can be seen as an extra reason for the need to be aware that the relative influence of stable and fleeting drivers upon our moral behaviors and decisions is regulated by *amoral* cognitive mechanisms of which construal level is one. That fact, in itself, is not necessarily problematic. It seems to me to be nonetheless imperative to strive to understand how cognitive processes such as construal level determine how and in what way we are affected by both fleeting and stable drivers within the moral domain. Only then can we avoid becoming prisoners of either our immediate situation or our stable convictions and commitments. Morality and our moral behavior, I would argue, is too important to be fully determined by those types of drivers that happen to be facilitated by our state of mind. Being conscious of construal level’s influence may be a step towards counteracting that.

Furthermore, I do believe that the framework I present here allows for a relatively parsimonious analysis of most (if not all) situations characterized by a tension between the short-term and fleeting and the long-term and stable. After all, it seems quite absurd to suggest that this effect of construal level should be restricted to the limited, albeit informative, set of contexts that I have studied here. Ultimately, my framework implies that much of our (moral) behavior is the result of what I have called a cognitive balancing act. That is to say: Much of our behavior is the result of finding some balance between the pull of fleeting drivers and the push of stable ones. Seen in this way, my thesis actually is in line with a long tradition in moral thinking. A tradition, to be specific, that views morality, essentially, as the attempt to find the right balance in life (see e.g.

Abend, 2012; Alfano, 2013). To lead a morally successful life, my research suggest that this balancing act should extend towards our cognition.

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Summary

The sun is out but in my office the only thing that shines is the screen of my computer. I have a distinct craving for a cold beer and would love to relax a bit in the sun. Instead, however, I am drinking tea and working on this summary. Why? How am I able to withstand the lure of sun and beer outside? My dissertation is devoted to providing an answer to precisely this question.

More formally, I study conflicts between what I call ‘stable’ and ‘fleeting’ drivers of decision-making and behavior. Stable drivers are motivators that we are likely to encounter across many different situations. A commitment to finishing a big project is an example, but so is a promise to remain faithful to a long-term partner, or sticking to moral norms and rules. These drivers are stable because they are not tied to a particular situation – even if the sun would not be out I am driven to work on my dissertation; even if we would not have the chance to take advantage of the situation, we may be motivated to be honest no matter what, and so on. Fleeting drivers, in contrast, are motivators that are uniquely present in the current situation. My craving for a cold beer is a fleeting driver, but so is the temptation to take advantage of another’s incidental vulnerability.

In virtually any situation we encounter we are confronted both fleeting as well as stable drivers. Yet, for most people it is true that at certain times fleeting drivers may hold a much stronger sway over them than stable ones, while at other times they barely notice similar fleeting drivers and stick to their stable commitments or long-term goals. In this dissertation I develop a framework to explain *both* why we might sometimes give in to fleeting cues *as well as* why we may at other times rigidly stick to stable ones. I start from the observation that given the fact that in any situation both fleeting and stable drivers will be relevant, what matters to understand why we behave in the ways we behave is not only to identify the (fleeting and stable) drivers relevant in a given situation but also what determines the influence of these drivers relative to each other. For stable drivers to take hold, I argue in this dissertation, it is important that the ‘push’ or ‘pull’ of

fleeting drivers is quelled in one or another. For this it is needed that one is able to disengage from the immediate situation, to take – in other words – a metaphorical step back from the ‘here’ and the ‘now’. This ‘step back’ allows one to focus on longer-term commitments and other stable drivers without getting distracted by the need to attend to fleeting elements of the current situation. The cognitive mechanism that allows for this is cognitive abstraction or ‘construal level’: abstraction – or ‘high construal level’ – is precisely this disengagement from the current circumstances and has already been associated with a stronger influence of stable drivers on evaluation, decision-making and behavior (when compared to concrete cognition – ‘low construal level’).

In particular, I argue that high construal level *facilitates* the expression of stable drivers in decision-making and *quells* the influence of fleeting ones, whereas low construal level has the opposite effect. The reason for this is that low construal level is a more situationally sensitive form of cognition: by definition more peripheral fleeting elements are part of a low construal level of a given situation than are part of a high construal level of the same situation. Because of this, these fleeting elements tend to have a stronger influence on decision-making under low construal level and less under high construal level. In other words, high construal level, being a less situationally sensitive form of cognition, leaves more ‘room’ for stable drivers to come to expression. This effect allows them to have relatively more influence than under low construal level.

Even though this effect should hold true for any situation in which fleeting and stable drivers conflict, I argue that this holds special significance for the psychological study of morality. Many important moral conflicts we may encounter in life are describable as conflicts between norms, values, long-term commitments and so on – that is: stable drivers – and infatuations, temptations, what is practical right now and so on (i.e. fleeting drivers). Moral temptations (e.g. taking advantage of a vulnerable other) are one example. However, there are also conflicts between stable and fleeting drivers in which it is less clearly true that acting on stable drivers is the morally desirable thing to do. Also such situations hold special significance

from the perspective of moral psychology. For instance, being swayed by incidental sympathies may not always be the optimal way to punish perpetrators, but the same may be said for rigidly or even draconically enforcing moral rules. What matters in these situations is striking some balance between yielding to fleeting drivers and sticking to stable ones. Construal level is the cognitive mechanism that directly affects this balancing act.

In sum, I argue that low construal level makes people more likely to yield to fleeting, situational, drivers leading to *flexible* behavior (depending on the specific fleeting drivers present in the situation). High construal level makes people less likely to yield to fleeting drivers, making for cross-situational *consistency* in behavior. I investigated this overarching prediction in four different research lines, each dedicated to a phenomenon that is important for the regulation of social life: cooperation (Chapter 2), punishment (Chapters 3 and 4) and trust maintenance (Chapter 5).

Specifically, in Chapter 2 I focused on situations in which one feels trusted. This, I argue, provides for a dual-motive situation (i.e. a dilemma): the benefits of displaying cooperative behavior are generally long-term. On the other hand, a trusting interaction partner is also easily taken advantage of. This (taking an advantage of another person's trust) is likely more beneficial in the short term, but is likely to impair the quality of the relationship over the long term. In line with my general arguments my findings showed that people are likely to respond to feeling trusted by behaving cooperatively, but only under high construal level. Under low construal level feeling trusted did not evoke cooperative responses.

In Chapter 3 I showed that fleeting drivers affect punishment decisions in response to moral failures under low, but not under high, level construal. This was true for drivers that belonged to the perpetrator side (i.e. perpetrator status) and the punisher side (punisher self-interest) of the dyad. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I focused on an ironic consequence of my argument when applied to punishment. I argued that construal level

affects how moral norms are perceived: as either guidelines *proscribing* appropriate behaviors or as impediments *discouraging* certain behaviors – in much the same way as spouses may experience their long term commitment to each other as a guideline for to behave in the right way or as obstacle to extramarital sex. I argued that high construal level is associated with the first understanding, whereas low construal level is associated with the latter. A worrying conclusion of this is that it makes low construal level leaders reluctant to enforce moral rules in the face of moral follower transgression. Two experimental studies and one web-based quasi-experiment showed that low construal level made leaders indeed react leniently to follower moral transgression.

Chapter 5, lastly, was devoted to trust maintenance by issuing apologies in the aftermath of a moral transgression. In particular, I argued that two different elements of apologies may motivate a victim to grant trust. First, apologies typically contain a causal explanation of the transgression (an attribution) which helps the victim to make sense of the situation and quells uncertainty. However, issuing an apology is also, by definition, a symbolic gesture aimed at making amends. Whereas attributions in apologies are highly variable – they may, in fact, vary alongside three dimensions: locus of causality (i.e. internal or external to the perpetrator), controllability and stability – the symbolic meaning of an apology is by definition stable. I showed, because of this, that attributions tend to drive the trust maintaining effect of apologies under low construal level, but not under high construal level. In other words: under low construal level victims grant trust flexibly as a result of the attributions used in the apology, under high construal level victims do so consistently across situations, indicating a stronger focus on the symbolic meaning of an apology.

Taken together, these studies indicate that construal level determines the relative influence of both stable and fleeting cues across a wide variety of contexts and for different types of behaviors. Even though I was – for obvious reasons – unable to sample the complete spectrum of both fleeting and stable drivers that exist in the world, I believe these results indicate that the process I describe can be generalized to any context

where stable and fleeting drivers conflict each other. Scientifically, my framework is thus a valuable tool to understand what motivates moral behavior under specific circumstances. Practically, my research shows how the influence of both fleeting and stable drivers upon our behaviors is regulated by construal level. I claim that it is important to be aware of this influence to avoid becoming a prisoner of the situation, so to speak, on the one hand, or, on the other, a dogmatist rigidly sticking to strict rules – which is why, not so long from now anymore, I will have that beer.

Samenvatting (Dutch summary)

Buiten schijnt de zon, binnen alleen het scherm van mijn computer. Ik heb zin in een biertje, al was het maar om even ontspannen, maar mijn dissertatie en deze samenvatting het bijzonder moeten af. Dus drink ik thee en schrijf maar door. Waarom? Hoe lukt het mij om de lokroep van zon en bier te weerstaan en mij op deze samenvatting te concentreren? Dat is, in essentie, de vraag die ik in deze dissertatie probeer te beantwoorden.

Specifieker, in mijn dissertatie kijk ik precies naar dit soort conflicten tussen korte termijn (dit noem ik ‘vluchtige’), en lange termijn (‘stabiele’) drijfveren van ons gedrag. Veel morele dilemma’s die wij in ons dagelijkse leven kunnen tegenkomen zijn in essentie conflicten tussen vluchtige en stabiele drijfveren. Voorbeelden zijn niet moeilijk te verzinnen. Stel je bijvoorbeeld voor dat je een unieke kans krijgt om nu met de vrouw of man van je dromen naar bed te gaan (een vluchtige drijfveer), ondanks een lange en betekenisvolle relatie met een ander (een stabiele drijfveer). Maar ook geld uitgeven aan dat ene extra biertje (vluchtige drijfveer) in plaats van te sparen voor die lange wereldreis die je altijd al hebt willen maken (stabiele drijfveer), of de noodzaak een schattig kind (vluchtige drijfveer) te bestraffen voor het overtreden van een regel (stabiele drijfveer), zijn voorbeelden van dergelijke conflicten.

Per definitie zijn vluchtige drijfveren invloeden die uniek zijn binnen een bepaalde situatie: niet elk kind is schattig, je hebt maar één kans om met de man of vrouw van je dromen te slapen enzovoorts. Stabiele drijfveren zijn juist invloeden die van belang zijn ongeacht de specifieke situatie: wat de omstandigheden ook zijn, je hebt nu eenmaal die lange relatie, en hoe schattig het kind ook is, een regel blijft een regel. Het moge geen verassing heten dat mensen soms handelen naar vluchtige drijfveren. Mensen gaan vreemd, geven te veel geld uit op avondjes stappen en straffen schattige kinderen minder hard (enzovoort). Dit is echter maar één deel van het verhaal: mensen handelen soms ook naar stabiele drijfveren in hun leven – sommigen gaat juist níet vreemd, geven niet te veel uit, straffen streng maar rechtvaardig enzovoort. In deze dissertatie presenteer ik een theoretisch raamwerk dat deze beide soorten gedragingen kan verklaren.

Ik begin met de observatie dat in bijna elke situatie we beïnvloed (kunnen) worden door zowel vluchtige en stabiele drijfveren. Om te begrijpen wat ons gedrag, met name ons morele gedrag, motiveert is het dus niet alleen van belang om te identificeren welke drijfveren er spelen in een situatie maar ook wat de relatieve invloed van die drijfveren bepaalt ten opzichte van elkaar. Ik beargumenteer dat stabiele drijfveren met name motiveren als we ons 'los kunnen maken' van onze huidige situatie. Als we sterk focussen op de details van de huidige situatie is het moeilijk ons lange termijn belang in het oog te houden. Met andere woorden: de invloed van stabiele drijfveren op ons gedrag en ook op onze beslissingen is sterker als de invloed van de situatie minder sterk is. Het omgekeerde is ook waar: naarmate de invloed van de situatie sterker is, is er minder 'ruimte' voor stabiele drijfveren om ons gedrag te beïnvloeden. Wat bepaalt de invloed van de situatie?

Eén belangrijk, en wellicht verassend, antwoord op die vraag is: cognitieve abstractie of 'construal level'. Construal level is het niveau van abstractie (of concreetheid) waarop stimuli, gebeurtenissen of objecten cognitief gerepresenteerd worden: ofwel relatief abstract (hoog construal level) of relatief concreet (laag construal level). Abstractie impliceert het weglaten van details, terwijl een concrete voorstelling van zaken juist vrij gedetailleerd is. Aangezien een abstracte voorstelling van zaken (of een hoog construal) minder details bevat, kunnen deze ook minder invloed uitoefenen. Details zijn per definitie vluchtige elementen van een situatie, in de zin dat het onwaarschijnlijk is dat we een bepaald situationeel detail in een andere situatie ook aantreffen. Met andere woorden: concrete cognitie (of laag construal) is een vorm van cognitie die gevoelig is voor situationele verschillen, terwijl abstracte cognitie een minder situationeel sensitieve vorm is. Abstracte cognitie dient er dus voor om, bij wijze van spreken, over de grenzen van de huidige situatie heen te kunnen kijken, terwijl concrete cognitie juist een focus op het 'hier' en 'nu' impliceert. Wanneer we dus een abstracte voorstelling van zaken hebben dan hebben stabiele drijfveren een sterkere invloed hebben op ons gedrag en onze beslissingen, maar wanneer we een concrete voorstelling van zaken hebben dan hebben vluchtige drijfveren juist meer drijfveer. In mijn dissertatie spreek ik van 'facilitatie': hoog

construal level faciliteert de expressie van stabiele drijfveren, laag construal level faciliteert de expressie van vluchtige drijfveren.

Ik bestudeer dit proces in de context van een aantal belangrijke vormen van moreel gedrag: coöperatie (Hoofdstuk 2), bestraffing (Hoofdstukken 3 en 4) en het beheer van interpersoonlijk vertrouwen (Hoofdstuk 5). Voor al deze vormen van gedrag geldt dat zowel vluchtige als stabiele drijfveren van belang zijn en – belangrijk – met elkaar conflicteren: als we handelen naar onze stabiele drijfveren vertonen we ander gedrag dan als we handelen naar onze vluchtige drijfveren. Hoofdstuk 2, bijvoorbeeld, gaat over de situatie waarin we ons vertrouwd voelen door een ander. Ik vraag me in dat hoofdstuk af wat bepaald of we daarop reageren we door dat vertrouwen te belonen (te coöpereren met die ander) of juist niet. Ik beargumenteer dat coöperatie op de lange termijn de meer voordelige optie is: alleen door te coöpereren blijft de relatie in stand en is het dus mogelijk er op de lange termijn de vruchten van te plukken. Echter, het feit dat een ander ons vertrouwd maakt die ander ook kwetsbaar voor exploitatie. Hij of zij is immers bereid om ons te vertrouwen, en is daarom minder geneigd ons gedrag te monitoren. Niet coöpereren is daarom op de korte termijn voordeliger. Op de korte termijn is coöperatie vooral duur: we moeten immers ons eigen belang opgeven voor dat van de groep. In lijn met mijn argumentatie hierboven laat ik dus zien dat gevoeld vertrouwen leidt tot coöperatie, maar alleen voor hoog construal level. Voor laag construal level, als mensen dus vooral concreet nadenken, vind ik geen effecten van gevoeld vertrouwen op coöperatie.

Hoofdstukken 3 en 4 gaan beide over bestraffen. In Hoofdstuk 3 laat ik zien dat relatief vluchtige drijfveren invloed hebben op strafgedrag voor laag construal level, maar niet voor hoog. Morele principes drijven strafgedrag juist voor hoog construal level, maar niet voor laag. In Hoofdstuk 4 focus ik op een ironisch effect hiervan. Hier laat ik zien dat morele regels, normen en principes op twee verschillende manieren beschouwd kunnen worden: als richtlijn voor passend gedrag of juist als frustrerend obstakel – op min of meer dezelfde manier als echtgenoten hun trouwbelofte ofwel als richtlijn voor wat te doen en vooral

te laten kunnen beschouwen ofwel als obstakel dat tussen hun en buitenechtelijke seksuele relaties staat. Ik beargumenteer dat hoog construal level is geassocieerd met de eerste conceptualisatie (morele normen worden gezien als richtlijn), laag construal level juist met de tweede (morele normen zijn obstakels). In dit hoofdstuk bekijk ik dit in de context van leiders in organisaties die volgers die moreel over de schreef gaan moeten bestraffen. In twee experimenten en één quasi-experiment dat ik op het Internet heb afgenomen laat ik zien dat laag construal level leiders overtredingen relatief mild bestraffen, terwijl hoog construal level leiders overtreding juist relatief zwaar bestraffen.

In hoofdstuk 5, tenslotte, bekijk ik het herstel en beheer van vertrouwen na een morele overtreding als gevolg van een verontschuldiging. In dit hoofdstuk toon ik aan hoe vertrouwensherstel als gevolg van een verontschuldiging door twee verschillende processen wordt gedreven. Ten eerste bevat een verontschuldiging een causale verklaring van de overtreding (een attributie). Attributies kunnen vertrouwen beïnvloeden omdat ze causale onzekerheid wegnemen en het slachtoffer helpen de overtreding te begrijpen. Echter, een verontschuldiging is – ten tweede – ook een symbolisch gebaar om het weer goed te maken. Attributies zijn variabele elementen van een verontschuldiging – attributies kunnen zelfs op drie dimensies variëren: de locus van de causaliteit (intern of extern aan de dader), controleerbaarheid en stabiliteit – terwijl de symbolische waarde van een verontschuldiging per definitie constant is. In dit hoofdstuk laat ik dus zien, in lijn met mijn argumentatie, dat laag construal level het effect van attributies faciliteert, terwijl hoog construal level dat effect juist inperkt. Met andere woorden: laag construal level zorgt ervoor dat het slachtoffer op een flexibele wijze vertrouwen schenkt aan de dader, als een functie van de attributies in de verontschuldiging. Hoog construal level zorgt er juist voor dat vertrouwensherstel niet door attributies beïnvloedt wordt, en zorgt dus voor een consistentere vorm van vertrouwensherstel.

Samengevat tonen mijn studies aan dat construal level de relatieve drijfveer van vluchtige en stabiele drijfveren op ons gedrag reguleert. Ik beargumenteer dat dat effect van groot belang is voor moreel gedrag,

aangezien dat vaak subject is van drijfveer van zowel stabiele als vluchtige drijfveren, maar mijn raamwerk zou van toepassing moeten zijn op alle situaties waar vluchtige en stabiele drijfveren conflicteren. Vanuit wetenschappelijk oogpunt, de belangrijkste bijdrage van mijn onderzoek is dus dat het een raamwerk biedt op basis waarvan we zowel de motivationele invloed van vluchtige als die van stabiele drijfveren kunnen verklaren en kunnen begrijpen waarom en wanneer ofwel stabiele ofwel vluchtige drijfveren twee expressie krijgt in gedrag en beslissingen. In meer praktische zin beargumenteer ik dat het van belang is om ons bewust te zijn van deze drijfveer, al was het maar om aan de kant geen gevangene te worden van de situatie en onze korte termijn verlangens en, aan de andere, kant ook niet ten prooi ten vallen aan het dogmatisme en alleen maar van rigide regels uit te gaan – alleen al daarom, dus, ga ik straks aan het bier.

Acknowledgements

Boeken hebben hun geschiedenis

*het boek is nog niet uit
 het is wel een uiterst klein dun boek
 een handboek een schemerboek
 in de boekenkast is het altijd zoek
 ook valt het van tafel in het niets
 valt het tussen de woorden van praters
 tussen het gebrul van elokwente sprekers
 ver weg ontbladert het in het witte woud
 schurftig komt het soms terug zacht
 is zijn vragende oogopslag in een hoek
 vergeten gaat het liggen en vergeeft
 tussen de onverschillige pissebedden
 wordt het een stehgeiger voor stijfkoppige
 dovemansoren geen eenvoudige boodschap
 verlaat meer het boek het is slaapverwekkend
 ook de lezer is slaapwekkend maar die eet
 vrijt slaapt en doet aan krachtsport
 die werkt zich zeker tevreden in het zweet
 die danst met hanetred rond zijn windei
 en bereikt zo de juiste vorm de hemel op aarde*

- Lucebert (1924 – 1994)

The book, my book, is not quite finished yet. Nonetheless, there are of course a great number of people (and at least one dog) I am thankful to for helping me along in the last four years; friends, family, colleagues – even some strangers. I like to believe that these people – and especially the dog – are aware of my gratefulness. If not, I will try my utmost best to make sure to let them know. Then there are also some people – fortunately not many – I am less grateful to. I hope they will never find out.

About the author



Gijs van Houwelingen (1985) was born in Middelburg, the Netherlands. He joined ERIM in 2010 as a first-generation ‘Open PhD’-candidate. Before that he obtained bachelor and master degrees (both *cum laude*) in both philosophy (Leiden University and VU University Amsterdam) as well as economics (VU University Amsterdam and University of Amsterdam). His research is either published or under review at different important journals within organizational behaviour, among them *Journal of Management*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* and *European Journal for Social Psychology*. He is currently looking forward to start working in a non-academic function to be able to apply all this knowledge on ‘real world problems’ (but only after a well-deserved holiday).

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SOMETHING TO RELY ON**THE INFLUENCE OF STABLE AND FLEETING DRIVERS ON MORAL BEHAVIOR**

Within the 'moral domain' certain seeming immutable rules are often in conflict with our ever-changing circumstances. When punishing another person – a child, say, or a subordinate – for a moral transgression it is usually thought important to do so in a way that is fair and equal to other perpetrators, yet takes into account the potential exceptional circumstances of the transgression. This dissertation is devoted to precisely this balancing act. In it, I ask why and how either stable (e.g. moral rules and norms) or fleeting (e.g. circumstances) gain influence relative to each other within moral decision making and behavior. My answer might be surprising to some: cognitive abstraction or 'construal level'. Cognitive abstraction (or 'construal level') regulates the situational sensitivity of cognition and – because of that – the relative influence of fleeting and stable drivers. High (abstract) construal level allows for a 'mental step back' from the immediate context, allowing cross-situationally stable drivers to exert influence. Low (concrete) construal level, in contrast, is more immersive and allows fleeting drivers to have stronger effects. I show this with regard to several important behaviors that make social life possible, including cooperation, punishment and trust maintenance. There is, in another words, always something to rely on – but what exactly we rely on depends on how we construe matters.

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