EDUCATING FOR ETHICAL SURVIVAL

RESEARCH IN ETHICAL ISSUES IN ORGANIZATIONS

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EDUCATING FOR ETHICAL SURVIVAL

EDITED BY

MICHAEL SCHWARTZ
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia

HOWARD HARRIS
University of South Australia, Australia

CHARMAYNE HIGHFIELD
Chartered Accountant, Singapore

HUGH BREAKEY
Griffith University, Australia

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Rohini Balapumi holds a PhD in Information Systems and is an Instructor at the School of Management, Curtin University. With background in Computer Science and Management, she teaches various undergraduate units in Information Systems and Management studies. She also supervises postgraduate dissertation students in research areas relating to enterprise resource planning, technologies in supply chain management, and social media and online learning. Her research interests include reflective practices in higher education, technologies in education, and sustainability in education. As an endorsement of her contributions in teaching and learning practices in higher education, she has been awarded with Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA).

Dr Hugh Breakey is a Senior Research Fellow in Moral Philosophy at Griffith University's Institute for Ethics, Governance & Law. He has extensive experience in the application of ethical, legal, and political philosophy to challenging practical fields, including such diverse areas as peacekeeping, safety industries, institutional governance, integrity systems and corruption, climate change, sustainable tourism, resource and common property, professional ethics, and international law. As well as his academic contributions, with more than 50 research publications, his work has practical significance. He has consulted for several Australian government agencies, including the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Financial Adviser Standards and Ethics Authority, and the Professional Standards Councils. Since 2013, he has served as the President of the Australian Association of Professional and Applied Ethics.

Debra R. Comer is the Mel Weitz Distinguished Professor in Business in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship in Hofstra University's Zarb School of Business. She received her PhD in Organisational Behaviour from Yale University. Her research interests include neurodiversity in the workplace, character in management education, and ethical behaviour in organisations. She is the Book/Film Review Editor for *Research in Ethical Issues in Organisations*.

Andrew Crowden is a Practical Ethicist. He is an Associate Professor in Philosophy at the University of Queensland's School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne, and Adjunct Professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast where he is the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee and Chairperson of the Animal Ethics Committee. He is also Deputy Chair of the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee. He has published articles in national and international journals.

Dr Matthew Gildersleeve teaches and conducts research at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. He has published articles in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *European Psychiatry*, *META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy*, the *Humanistic Psychologist, Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, *Quadrant: The Journal of the CG Jung Foundation*, and *Philosophy Now*.

Bligh Grant is an Associate Professor of Politics, Policy and Applied Ethics at the Centre for Local Government, University of Technology Sydney. Australia. His is the Director of the Master of Local Government Programme, is an Executive Editor of the *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, and a Public Officer of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics.

Dr Howard Harris taught Ethics in the Business School at the University of South Australia in Adelaide. His first degree is in chemical engineering and he worked in the Pacific Islands for 10 years before returning to Australia where he later completed his PhD. He is a former President of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics and General Secretary of the International Society for Business, Economics and Ethics.

Dr Charmayne Highfield is a Chartered Accountant, whose professional career has traversed public practice, commerce, healthcare, and education. She first joined academia in an adjunct capacity in 2002, subsequently undertaking various roles in curriculum and assessment development in Australia and Singapore. In addition to promoting excellence in accounting education, her current research interests include ethics education, human capital, organisation value creation, and the future economy. She is currently the Editor of *Australian Ethics*, the bi-annual newsletter of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics, as well as the Association's Treasurer.

John Humphreys (DBA, Nova Southeastern University) is a Professor of Management and Provost and the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Texas A&M University-Commerce. He has produced over 100 intellectual contributions focussed on leadership, leader identity, management history, strategy, and ethics. His scholarship has appeared in numerous venues including the *Harvard Business Review*, *Human Relations*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *Organization*, *Management Decision*, *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *Leadership, Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, and the *Journal of Management History*.

Dr Umera Imtinan holds a PhD in Information Systems. Umera's primary area of research is mobile and blended learning and learning technologies. However, she is keen to explore the application of ethics, ethical theories, and reflective practices in the field of information technology particularly in the areas of cyber security, artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning, and data science. As a

researcher, she is also studying the role of women in STEM (focussing on computer science). She is endeavouring to become an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Kendra Ingram (EdD, Texas A&M University – Commerce) is an Assistant Professor of Management and Marketing at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. Her current research focus is social intelligence and mental health in relation to organisational cultures. Her research and publications have extended into areas of leadership, online learning, management history, as well as entrepreneurial marketing and management empirical case studies. She currently serves as the President-Elect of Southwest Case Research Association and as the Vice President of Programmes for the Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Dr Theodora Issa, SFHEA, FAIM, holds a PhD in Management, is a Multi-Award winner (e.g. Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Award, Researcher of the year, and Highest RPI), and a Senior Lecturer at Curtin University, Australia. Currently, she is conducting her ongoing research on ethical mindsets. She has published her work in several peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters, papers, and research reports. She supervised PhD students and is interested in volunteering, and currently an active member at the World Council of Churches (a) delegate, 2012, (b) member of Central Committee November 2013, (c) member of Education and Ecumenical Formation Commission June 2014, and (d) member of The Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration June 2016.

Dr Tomayess Issa, SFHEA, holds a PhD in Information Systems, is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Management at Curtin University, Australia. She completed her doctoral research in Web development and Human Factors. Currently, she conducts research locally and globally in information systems, HCI, usability, social networking, sustainability, sustainable design, green IT, and teaching and learning. She has published her work in several peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters, papers, and research reports. Finally, she supervised PhD, MPhil, and Master Dissertations; and received Curtin Guild Awards for her teaching and supervision. In 2017, she received the university wide overall winner Student Guild Outstanding Achievement in Teaching Excellence 2017 Award.

Lydia Maketo is a Tutor in the School of Management at Curtin University. She currently works with undergraduate students teaching various undergraduate units in Information Systems and Management studies. She is currently finalising her thesis on mobile learning at Curtin University, and completed her PhD Third Milestone on 23 April 2020. She nurtures keen research interests in integrating technology with education and teaching and learning practices in higher education. She enjoys her role as an instructor engaging with her students, thrilled to see them succeed. As an endorsement of her contributions in teaching

and learning practices in higher education, she has been awarded with Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Glenn Martin has been a Teacher of Human Resources and Business and Professional Ethics. He has written extensively on management, business ethics, employment law, and training and development. He has been the editor of publications for professionals and an instructional designer for online learning in universities and commercial enterprises. He has been a high school teacher and a manager of community services organisations. He has also written around 20 books – on ethics, family history, collections of poems, and books that are reflections on experience. He lives in Sydney, although he lived in the bush on the far north coast of New South Wales for two decades. He holds a BBus (Hons) from Southern Cross University and a MEd (Online Educ) from the University of Southern Queensland.

Dr Joseph Naimo is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Ethics for the University of Notre Dame, Australia, working in the Sunny Coastal City of Fremantle, Western Australia. His extensive research interests broadly fit within the areas of metaphysics and ethics. He increasingly serves as an advocate working on social justice issues towards improving the lives of people living with disabilities impacted by defective disability services enabled more so by defective associated governance institutions.

Milorad Novicevic (PhD, Oklahoma University) is an Associate Professor of Management at the University of Mississippi. His research is focussed on examining phenomena in educational and business contexts. He has published around 150 articles in peer-reviewed journals including, *Journal Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics: European Review*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Journal of World Business*.

Dr Timothy F. O'Shannassy is a Senior Lecturer in the Graduate School of Business and Law at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University, Melbourne, Australia. He earned his PhD from Monash University. He supervises higher degree students and teaches strategic management in the MBA programmes at the RMIT. He is Managing Author of *Strategic Management: The Challenge of Creating Value* (Routledge Publishing). His work appears in leading journals including *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *Journal of Management and Organization*, and *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*. Tim served as RMIT MBA Programs Director in 2015 and 2016 and currently sits on the RMIT Academic Board.

Dr Janine Pierce is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of South Australia, where she is also a lecturer/researcher, in the areas of management, ethics, sustainability, and communication. Her PhD was in the area of community

sustainability, which has been the main focus of her research projects both in Australia and developing countries. She has worked with Australian Council of International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and other organisations, and has found that particularly in the area of sustainability of people and the planet, it is difficult to separate sustainability from ethical considerations. This has led to her research publications in the areas of ethics, sustainability, and her particular interest area of Photovoice in documenting and assessing impact of foreign aid programs and community issues and stories. She has had a number of publications and reports, and also serves on the Board of Aquaculture without Frontiers.

Brandon Randolph-Seng (PhD, Texas Tech University) is an Associate Professor of Management at Texas A&M University – Commerce. His current research primarily examines the ethical and social cognitive factors in leadership, entrepreneurship, and teams. He has published in such outlets as *Business & Society*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, and *Academy of Management Review* and served as a Co-editor for the *Handbook of Entrepreneurial Cognition*. He currently serves as Editor-in-Chief for the journal, *Management Decision*.

Foster Roberts (PhD, University of Mississippi) is an Assistant Professor of Management at Auburn University at Montgomery. His primary research interests include leadership, fluid team dynamics, management history, and ethics in entrepreneurship. His publications have appeared in the *Journal of Management Education*, *Management Decision*, *Business Horizons*, *International Journal of Product Development*, and *Logistics Management*, among others.

Michael Schwartz is an Associate Professor of Business Ethics in the School of Economics, Finance & Marketing at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He is a past President of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics. He is a member of the editorial boards of the *Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics* and the *Journal of International Business & Law*; and a Joint Editor of *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*.

Dr Alan Tapper taught Philosophy in Perth, Western Australia, for about 20 years, mainly at Edith Cowan University, and has worked as a Public Policy Researcher at the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, Curtin University, for about 10 years. His interests include social policy, philosophy in schools, general ethics, professional ethics, and eighteenth century intellectual history. He is currently the Vice President of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics. His philosophical work can be accessed at *https://philpeople. org/profiles/alan-tapper*.

The **Revd Robin Tapper** has worked, inter alia, as a Legal Practitioner in Western Australia, as a Lecturer in law at the University of Western Australia (UWA), and as a Legal Officer with the Legal Profession Complaints Committee of the Legal

Practice Board of Western Australia. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Faculty of Law at UWA and an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Perth.

Dr Leila Toiviainen was born and went to school in Finland. She did her nursing and midwifery training in England, and then worked as a registered nurse in England, New Zealand, and Australia. She did her philosophy degree, including a doctorate in philosophy, at the University of Tasmania, her dissertation was on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra. She has taught Philosophy and Applied Ethics at the University of Tasmania for 20 years and is currently an Adjunct Researcher in Philosophy, with her main focus as a philosophy supervisor of doctoral dissertations.

EDUCATING FOR ETHICAL SURVIVAL

Michael Schwartz, Howard Harris, Charmayne Highfield and Hugh Breakey

In a world whose inhabitants are traumatised by the threat of a pandemic, survival must matter. Perhaps even more so than ever before. After all, governments are spending mind-boggling sums to ensure that the citizenry survives and in doing so creating unimaginable debts for future generations, whilst closing down viable economic activities which gainfully employed many: so very clearly survival alone must matter. But this issue is not concerned with survival per se but ethical survival. The issue consists of two sections. The first section has six double-blind refereed papers. The second section comprises the papers presented at the last year AAPAE Sydney Symposium. Our co-editors, Charmayne Highfield and Hugh Breakey, will discuss this second section below. Before they do, we will introduce the six refereed papers.

The first contribution to this issue removes us from the current economic chaos we are experiencing and returns us to the Gilded Age of American business history. There these contributors alert us to the threats to ethical survival in the face of malevolent leadership. In their paper, 'Propensity to Morally Disengage: The Malevolent Leader Dyad of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick', Brandon Randolph-Seng, John Humphreys, Milorad Novicevic, Kendra Ingram and Foster Roberts, using the example of the fraught relationship between two American titans, show how egoism permeates a moral identity: And how that in turn promotes both symbolic moral self-regard and moral licensing which, in turn, augments the propensity to morally disengage. Using insights from their analyses, Randolph-Seng, Humphreys, Novicevic, Ingram and Roberts illustrate a process conceptualisation which ultimately justifies unethical behaviour.

The second contribution in this issue is by Timothy F. O'Shannassy. In his paper 'Using Ethics of Governance to Sooth Tensions on Strategic Intent: Artfully Managing an Age Old Source of War in Organisations', O'Shannassy,

in a similar vein to Randolph-Seng, Novicevic, Ingram and Roberts, explores discord in the organisation and the ability to avoid it and survive ethically. The paper explores ethics of governance deficiencies which include weak management of the principal-agent problem by the board of directors, and conflict over the strategic intent of the organisation. Organisations must avoid this source of tension which is caused by the emergence of managerial hegemony over the organisation. Instead, O'Shannassy argues that organisations must promote sound executive stewardship and effective social exchange. Consequently, this paper highlights the importance of strategic intent as a unifying rhetorical message and as a key component of an ethics of governance.

Our next contribution is by Janine Pierce. Pierce's ambitions in her paper 'Peace and the Planet: Finding Our Way Back' extend beyond the organisation to the planet. Pierce is concerned with securing ethical survival globally. To do so, Pierce argues that something more is required than the United Nations and their associated Sustainable Development Goals. Instead, humans need to be morally attuned to the realisation that they exist as a part of the ecosystem. Consequently, any harm they inflict on the planet is harm which they inflict upon themselves. Pierce suggests how we might do so drawing both from indigenous wisdom and the current Pope, Pope Francis.

The following contribution in this issue has somewhat more limited aims. Debra R. Comer and Michael Schwartz in their paper 'Farewell to the Boasting of Posting: Encouraging Modesty on Social Media' are concerned with the ethical survival of their students when employed. And that their students understand the implications of posting their successes on social media. After discussing the pervasiveness of boastful posts and reviewing the research indicating the inverse association between individuals' routine exposure to posts depicting the curated lives and accomplishments of friends and acquaintances and their emotional well-being, Comer and Schwartz explore what the virtue of modesty entails. They then discuss how they have raised their students' awareness that modesty matters, clarified for them what it is, and given them techniques to help them work towards it.

In the following paper 'What Should Be Taught in Courses on Social Ethics?', Alan Tapper discusses the concept and the content of courses on 'social ethics', and, in doing so, presents a dilemma that arises in the design of such courses. Following Tapper, this dilemma is that these courses are often courses in 'applied ethics' where moral theories are applied to moral and social problems, or they are courses in 'occupational ethics'. Tapper instead argues for courses which occupy what he terms 'some middle ground' that might be designated 'social ethics'. Tapper describes that ground as the ethics of 'social practices' and illustrates how this approach to the teaching of ethics may be carried out in five domains.

In the last paper in this section 'The Role of Reflection in Learning at Higher Education', Theodora Issa, Tomayess Issa, Rohini Balapumi, Lydia Maketo and Umera Imtinan answer the question 'Why reflection is important to introduce in teaching and learning'. They do so utilising data collected from a sample population of 257 undergraduate students in business ethics undergraduate classes in Australia. This paper commences with a brief literature review on reflection,

followed by the provision of tentative results of a study on the role of reflection in learning. The paper discusses the students' reflections on their personal learning as a global citizen. Furthermore, how that perspective informed their views on both the ethical decision-making process and global citizenship.

SPECIAL SECTION: TEACHING APPLIED ETHICS

Introduction

Teaching applied ethics to practically minded students presents a host of challenges. It can seem to call for multiple distinct types of expertise in the teacher – requiring them to be an academic expert on moral philosophy as well as on the practical field in question, and, on top of this, to have the type of lived professional experience that alone makes practical ethical discussions grounded, useful and engaging. Worse, applied ethics classes can pose similar challenges for *students*, who may be enthusiastic and high achieving in their chosen field of (say) engineering or medicine – but ambivalent at best about understanding moral theory.

This contribution aims to make the task of teaching applied ethics more tractable and constructive. Its purpose is to bring together the hard won insights of a selection of academics and ethicists who have worked for years (and sometimes decades) teaching applied ethics to students of practical fields like accounting, law, safety industries, science, nursing, information technology, environmental management, business tourism, local government and more. These ideas were explored at a 2-day Symposium in Sydney, Australia, run by the *Australian Association for Professional & Applied Ethics*. Invitees to the Symposium presented their views on topics surrounding teaching applied ethics through panel discussions followed by roundtable commentary and Q&A. After critical discussion and exploration, symposium members were invited to rework their presentations for publication in the form of practical guidance for teachers of applied ethics. The guidance contains suggestions on how to approach course content, methods on how to engage sceptical classes, ideas on how to nurture future ethical behaviour and more. It will be of most use to those relatively new to teaching applied ethics, but it is to be hoped that there are sufficient insights and fresh perspectives to reward even veteran ethics teachers.

A Brief Word on Peer Review

Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations (*REIO*) is an academic journal publishing original research that has been subjected to the standard peer review process. In the interests of scholarly clarity, it is appropriate to explicitly highlight that this special section of Issue 24 departs from *REIO*'s normal mode of academic publication. This section's purpose is more akin to that of a textbook (or even a 'how to' manual). The aim is to draw out techniques, insights and lessons learned from experienced practitioners, and to present them in an accessible manner to those who may have little background in moral philosophy, or even in humanities and the social sciences more generally. For this purpose, peer scholarly review

on (inter alia) the basis of research originality and command of literature would have been not only redundant but counterproductive. As such, the following section is based upon peer collaboration, and has been subject only to editorial review – not blind peer review. We are grateful to *REIO*'s editors for allowing the contribution to proceed in this exceptional way to deliver a product we hope will be of great use to many teachers of applied ethics.

We are also most grateful to Associate Professor Bligh Grant, Sara Freeland and the Institute for Public Policy and Governance at the University of Technology Sydney for their gracious hospitality in hosting the AAPAE Symposium.

We also thank all the contributors to this issue. Some are Australians. Others live abroad. Without this global contribution, we would not have an issue. But there are others both in Australia and abroad whose anonymous contributions made this issue possible, and these are our blind reviewers. Without the latter, the former would not have an issue to contribute to. As always, they have our heartfelt thanks.

PROPENSITY TO MORALLY DISENGAGE: THE MALEVOLENT LEADER DYAD OF ANDREW CARNEGIE AND HENRY FRICK

Brandon Randolph-Seng, John Humphreys, Milorad Novicevic, Kendra Ingram and Foster Roberts

ABSTRACT

Scholars have begun calling for broader conceptualisations of moral disengagement processes that reflect the interaction of dispositional and situational antecedents to a predilection to morally disengage. The authors argue that collective leadership may be one such contingent antecedent. While researching leaders from the Gilded Age of American business history, the authors encountered a compelling historical case that facilitates theory elaboration within these intersecting domains. Interpreting evidence from the embittered leader dyad of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick, the authors show how leader egoism can permeate moral identity to promote symbolic moral self-regard and moral licensing, which augment a propensity to morally disengage. The authors use insights developed from our analysis to illustrate a process conceptualisation that reflects a dispositional and situational interaction as a precursor to moral disengagement and explains how collective leadership can function as a moral disengagement trigger/tool to reduce cognitive dissonance and support the cognitive, behavioural, and rhetorical processes utilised to justify unethical behaviour.

 Keywords: Moral disengagement; collective leadership; displacement of responsibility; egoism; symbolic moral self-regard; moral justification

Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick's partnership is indicative of Frick's hostile retort shortly before Carnegie's death: "'Yes, you can tell Carnegie I'll meet him," Frick said finally, wadding the letter and tossing it back at Bridge, "Tell him I'll see him in Hell, where we both are going"' (Standiford, 2005, p. 15). As a result of morally duplicitous actions surrounding the violent 1892 Homestead Steel Mill strike (Bemis, 1894), the symbiotic and expedient relationship (Krass, 2001) of these Industrial Age co-leaders was forever fractured (Nasaw, 2006b; Standiford, 2005). Although Henry Frick is typically cast as the consummate villain in historical recitations (Skrabec, 2010), and does bear some culpability, we contend that this calamitous incident was largely the result of Andrew Carnegie's inclination to morally disengage (see Bostaph, 2015, p. 116).

While researchers have spent considerable efforts towards grasping the role moral disengagement, mechanisms play in corruption (Moore, 2008) and unethical actions, 'our understanding of moral disengagement remains at an early stage' (Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008, p. 374). Trying to move beyond simply revealing the consequences of moral detachment, recent research has been particularly focussed on discrete individual difference precursors (i.e. dispositional antecedents) that might predict a predisposition for moral disengagement (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Martin, 2014) and morally hypocritical behaviour (Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, & Johnson, 2015).

Yet, individual dispositions alone can be conceptually vague as, 'Human behavior is socially situated, intricately contextualised, and conditionally manifested' (Bandura, 2015, p. 1041). Therefore, scholars have begun calling for broader conceptualisations of moral disengagement processes that reflect the interaction of dispositional and situational antecedents to a propensity to morally disengage (Knoll, Lord, Petersen, & Weigelt, 2016; Moore, Detert, Klebe Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012; Walker, Frimer, & Dunlop, 2012).

Because displacement of individual responsibility is a cognitive mechanism used in the execution of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999), one conceivable situational antecedent worthy of consideration is collective leadership. Further, although the potential limitations (e.g. accountability) of plural forms of leadership have been debated with regard to effectiveness and practicality (Barnes, Humphreys, Oyler, Haden, & Novicevic, 2013), leadership researchers have yet to substantively approach collective leadership from the potential dark side.

With the current scholarly interest in moral disengagement processes (Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015) and plural forms of leadership (Gronn, 2015), we reasoned that an analysis of the compelling leader dyad of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick is conceptually generative. Towards this aim, we first review the extant literature regarding moral disengagement mechanisms and construct an argument for collective leadership as a prospective situational antecedent within the disengagement process. Next, we describe our historical case approach to theory elaboration and situate our dyadic leadership actors, Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick. Finally, we use insights developed from our analysis to illustrate a conceptualisation that reflects a dispositional and situational interaction

as a precursor to a propensity to morally disengage, as well as the significant cognitive, behavioural, and rhetorical processes used to justify unethical behaviour. Our analysis helps to fill gaps in theory by illustrating how leader egoism can pervade moral identity and foster symbolic moral self-regard and moral licensing to increase a propensity to morally disengage. Furthermore, we provide evidence to support a significant moral disengagement trigger/tool that has been ignored in the literature: collective leadership.

MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

Derived from social cognitive theory, the framework of moral disengagement was developed by Bandura (1986) to explain why people are capable, and often seemingly quite comfortable (Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005), with various forms of socially inappropriate conduct (Bandura, 1990). Although a majority of individuals appear to have internalised standards of ethical behaviour (Bandura, 1986), the degree to which those standards are salient at a given moment in time can depend partly on the instigation of various moral disengagement mechanisms (Bandura, 2002). When activated (Bandura, 1999), these disengagement mechanisms allow an individual to engage in unethical behaviour without feeling that their internal standards have been compromised (Welsh, Ordóñez, Snyder, & Christian, 2015). As such, we defined moral disengagement as the psychological, 'mechanisms that decouple one's internal moral standards from one's actions, facilitating engaging in unethical behavioral without feeling distress' (Moore, 2015, p. 199).

Overall, the moral disengagement mechanisms identified in the literature can be classified into three overarching orientations: cognitive-based, responsibility-based, and identification with others-based (Baron, Zhao, & Miao, 2015). For the mechanisms that are cognitively oriented, an adjustment in thinking about one's unethical behaviour can decrease the perception of that behaviour being unethical. For example, engaging in an unethical act as a means to a socially desirable outcome (i.e. moral justification) or comparing one's unethical conduct to behaviour that is even more reprehensible (i.e. advantageous comparison). Regarding the mechanisms that are responsibility oriented, a distortion of consequences and personal responsibility is involved (Stevens, Deuling, & Armenakis, 2012), such as attributing one's own unethical deed to another authority figure (i.e. displacement of responsibility) or to others in a relevant group (i.e. diffusion of responsibility). Finally, for those mechanisms that are identified with an 'others' orientation, a reduction in identifying with those that suffer the consequences of unethical behaviour is activated. For instance, claiming that those who are harmed are unimportant (i.e. dehumanisation) or that they are in some way responsible for putting themselves in a compromised situation (i.e. attribution of blame – Trevino & Nelson, 2014).

Research has shown that some portion of a propensity to morally disengage is attributable to individual dispositional differences, as moral disengagement

mechanisms have been found in individuals regardless of the situation (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). In an organisational context, duplicitous self-regulation often manifests in a functional attempt to balance the self-interests of powerful leaders (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010) with the needs of the broader organisation (Batson, Collins, & Powell, 2006). Key to this perspective of moral hypocrisy (i.e. motivation to appear moral but avoid the costs of being moral – Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997) is the need to employ moral disengagement processes (Barsky, 2011), such that one's duplicity (Graham et al., 2015) is unlikely to be detected by others in so much as one has also utilised moral disengagement means for self-deceptive rationalisation (Naso, 2006).

There is at least a modicum of evidence that the individual difference characteristics of moral identity (i.e. moral commitment as central to the self-concept), empathy (i.e. taking the perspective of others – De Waal, 2008), conscientiousness (i.e. felt responsibility to self and others), self-efficacy (i.e. performance self-belief), and an internalised locus of control (LOC – i.e. orientation of personal control) serve to inhibit a dispositional propensity to morally disengage (see Detert et al., 2008; Kish-Gephart et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2012). In contrast, trait anger (i.e. cynicism) and an externalised LOC (i.e. power LOC – oriented such that powerful others are assumed to be in control; and chance LOC – oriented such that fate is presumed to be in control) (Detert et al., 2008) are thought to be individual dispositional catalysts that can serve to deactivate moral self-regulatory processes and heighten a propensity to morally disengage (Moore et al., 2012).

Conversely, situational/contextual influences have been found to be related to incidences of moral disengagement as well (Kish-Gephart et al., 2014). Although many subsequent studies have curiously failed to heed his guidance, Bandura (1999, p. 207) emphasised the benefit of advancing beyond individual difference characteristics alone to consider situational influences:

> In social cognitive theory, both sociostructural and personal determinants operate interdependently within a unified causal structure in the perpetration of inhumanities. Unusual forms of malevolence are typically the product of a unique interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences.

In support of this viewpoint, Fleeson (2004) argued that dispositional differences correctly predict behavioural trends, while situational influences prompt more momentary behaviours; leading Walker et al. (2012, p. 289) to conclude that 'a solitary focus on the situation or personality is misguided if one is interested in an accurate test of moral functioning'. Thus, moral decisions and unethical behaviours should be studied as the 'product of the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective and social influences' (Bandura, 2002, p. 102).

Consequently, Moore et al. (2012, p. 38) called for scholars to simultaneously study 'both dispositional and situational influences, and their possible interaction'. Since it has been suggested that the moral disengagement mechanism of displacement of responsibility might be triggered by contextual circumstances (Moore et al., 2012), including the type (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016) and