THE ROLE OF CONSTRUCTION, INTUITION, AND JUSTIFICATION IN RESPONDING TO ETHICAL ISSUES AT WORK: THE SENSEMAKING-INTUITION MODEL

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Proponents of a popular view of how individuals respond to ethical issues at work claim that individuals use deliberate and extensive moral reasoning under conditions that ignore equivocality and uncertainty. I discuss the limitations of these "rationalist approaches" and reconsider their empirical support using an alternative explanation from social psychological and sensemaking perspectives. I then introduce a new theoretical model composed of issue construction, intuitive judgment, and post hoc explanation and justification. I discuss the implications for management theory, methods, and practice.

Several prominent theories claim that individuals use deliberate and extensive moral reasoning to respond to ethical issues, such as weighing evidence and applying abstract moral principles. These "rationalist approaches" have flourished, in part, because of their cumulative research agenda and the absence of well-developed alternative theoretical perspectives (Randall & Gibson, 1990). Despite their popularity and usefulness, it is important to evaluate these approaches to understand their limitations. I question several assumptions of rationalist approaches and answer scholars' calls to develop alternative theoretical views (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). I present a model based on social psychological and sensemaking perspectives—something I call the "sensemaking-intuition model" (SIM).

I argue that individuals engage in sensemaking under conditions of equivocality and uncertainty (Weick, 1979, 1995). Individuals' expectations and motivations affect this process such that they vary in how they construct ethical issues. Individuals then make intuitive judgments about their constructions of ethical issues. This view challenges the privileged status of moral reasoning in rationalist models by claiming that responses to ethical issues are not always based on deliberate and extensive moral reasoning. Although in previous research scholars have found partial support for rationalist approaches, I reconsider these findings in light of an alternative explanation using social psychological and sensemaking perspectives.

I first briefly review rationalist approaches and then discuss the limitations of this view. I then outline the alternative assumptions of my approach and describe the key components of the SIM: issue construction, intuitive judgment, and explanation and justification. I conclude by detailing the implications of this research for theory, methods, and practice.

REVIEW OF RATIONALIST APPROACHES

Philosophers back to at least Plato took a strong interest in how individuals respond to ethical issues, but social scientists have only recently begun to focus on responses to ethical issues in the context of business. I briefly review three prominent streams of research on how organizational actors respond to ethical issues—managers as "philosophers," person-situation, and issue-contingent approaches—and consider these as examples of rationalist approaches.

Managers As Philosophers Research

Some of the earliest models of individuals' responses to ethical issues borrowed directly

from traditional philosophical ethics. These views propose that managers, much like philosophers, draw on normative theories to make decisions about ethical issues. As a result, proponents claim that individuals often use deliberate and extensive moral reasoning. For example, Fritzsche and Becker (1984) presented individuals with a series of vignettes and asked them how they would respond to a morally questionable behavior, and why (see also Premeaux, 2004, and Premeaux & Mondy, 1993). The researchers classified individuals' explanations into major schools of philosophy, such as deontological and utilitarian reasoning. Hunt and Vitell (1986; see also Mayo & Marks, 1990) created a similar model, in which "the ultimate underlying assumption is that people . . . do in fact engage in both deontological and teleological evaluations in determining their ethical judgments, and ultimately, their behaviors" (Hunt & Vitell, 1986: 7). Both forms of reasoning involve ordinary organizational actors' use of rather intricate philosophical theories to reason and make calculations about ethical issues. Deontological reasoning involves comparisons between potential behaviors and predetermined deontological norms (e.g., honesty, fair treatment, etc.). Teleological evaluations involve calculations, such as perceived consequences of alternative actions for stakeholder groups (Hunt & Vitell, 1986: 9).

Person-Situation Research

Treviño (1986) raised the possibility that individuals may not actually use philosophical theories as the basis of moral reasoning; she more deeply rooted her theory in social science. Her "person-situation model" (see also Church, Gaa, Nainar, & Shehata, 2005) proposes that responses to ethical issues are a function of (1) a person's cognitions determined by his or her stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), (2) individual-difference moderators (ego strength, field dependence, and locus of control), and (3) situational moderators (organizational culture and characteristics of the work). While the person-situation model drops an explicit focus on philosophical reasoning, it retains a rationalist foundation by treating a manager's stage of moral development as an important explanatory device in how individuals respond to ethical issues (Treviño, 1986: 604). For exam-

ple, Treviño and Youngblood (1990) provided a management decision-making exercise for MBA students and found that individuals' responses to ethical issues are affected by their reasoning processes, as well as by rewards and punishments.

Issue-Contingent Research

Building on both the managers as philosophers and person-situation models, Jones (1991) published an "issue-contingent model," which calls attention to the importance of the characteristics of ethical issues. Jones posits that the "moral intensity" of an issue explains how people will react to ethical issues. Moral intensity is composed of differences in consequences (harms or benefits done to victims/beneficiaries), social consensus (degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil/good), probability of effect (joint probability the act in question will happen and the predicted harm/benefit will occur), temporal immediacy (distance between the present and the onset of the act's consequences), proximity (feeling near to the victim/beneficiary), and concentration of effect (the inverse function of the number of individuals affected by the act's magnitude).

One of the central claims of Jones' (1991) model, following Rest (1986), is that responses to ethical issues contain four components: recognition of a moral issue, ethical judgment, moral intent, and ethical behavior. All four components are affected by an issue's moral intensity. As an issue's moral intensity increases, individuals are more likely to recognize moral issues, make ethical judgments, establish moral intent, and engage in ethical behavior. Empirical research shows that the social consensus and magnitude of consequences components receive the strongest support, with other factors receiving mixed support (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005).

LIMITATIONS OF RATIONALIST APPROACHES

Rationalist approaches have been useful for advancing scholarly understanding of how individuals respond to ethical issues. Unlike much of the work on ethical issues (Randall & Gibson, 1990), rationalist models are grounded using clear and testable theoretical claims that allow for theory extension. Not surprisingly, a recent review found 174 empirical articles where the

dependent variable was one of the four stages of Rest's (1986, and, by extension, Jones' [1991]) model, including 32 using moral intensity (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). Despite this attention, rationalist perspectives have important limitations that scholars rarely surface, in part because of a lack of theoretical alternatives (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Randall & Gibson, 1990).

In this section I discuss four limitations. Rationalist approaches tend to (1) fail to address the presence of equivocality and uncertainty common in natural settings, (2) view deliberate and extensive reasoning as a precursor for ethical behavior, (3) underemphasize the constructive nature of "ethical issues," and (4) claim that moral reasoning is used to make moral judgments. Although not all three theories I reviewed above are subject to *all* four criticisms, they are historically intertwined with one another and collectively illustrate the rationalist approach by emphasizing deliberate and extensive reasoning and reflection.

Equivocality and Uncertainty

Equivocality involves the existence of several different, simultaneous interpretations (Weick, 1995: 91f). Uncertainty refers to a lack of information that makes constructing a plausible interpretation about a situation difficult. For example, individuals may have imprecise estimates about the consequences of their current actions on the future (March, 1994), such as if committing an action will harm others.

Equivocality and uncertainty are common themes in organizational theory, including Weick's theory of organizing (1979, 1995) and Dutton's (1997) view of strategic issues. While these views of equivocality and uncertainty were developed outside the specific domain of ethical issues, there are likely to be important applications to ethical issues. For example, McCaskey (1982) has proposed several factors that lead to equivocal situations. His "differences in value orientations" is something especially salient for moral problems given moral pluralism, and "unclear or conflicting goals" often arise when individuals are forced to choose between right and right (Badaracco, 1997) and need to satisfy conflicting stakeholder needs (Phillips, 2003).

While organizational scholars have historically recognized the importance of equivocality and uncertainty, some rationalist models fail to address these concepts—specifically, those based on issue-contingent approaches. To illustrate this point, I examine the two components of moral intensity that receive the most attention (and support) in the literature: (1) magnitude of consequences and (2) social consensus (May & Pauli, 2002).

Jones provides the following example for magnitude of consequences: an "act that causes 1,000 people to suffer a particular injury is of greater magnitude of consequence than an act that causes 10 people the same injury" (Jones, 1991: 374). This example assumes that whether 1,000 people or 10 people suffer, and to what degree, are known prior to individuals' engaging in (un)ethical behavior. But the hard part about ethical issues is often figuring out exactly what will happen from different (real or potential) behavioral responses. When individuals make guesses about such outcomes, they may have a positive illusion that prevents them from recognizing that their decision will even harm others (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Alternatively, individuals may develop several interpretations about the issue, which vary in the degree to which an act will have harmful consequences. In the former case, an absence of any interpretation involving harm exists, leading to uncertainty. In the latter case, multiple interpretations about potential harms lead to equivocality.

A second example comes from Jones' idea of social consensus: "the evil involved in bribing a customs official in Texas has greater social consensus than the evil involved in bribing a customs official in Mexico" (1991: 375). Others have pointed out that this conception of social consensus is a "relatively objective issue-related factor" (Butterfield, Treviño, & Weaver 2000: 990), implying that the issue varies, not its interpretation. But individuals are likely to vary in how they understand a social consensus. An individual who has already committed a bribe in Mexico (and got caught) may infer a different social consensus than someone who did not get caught. Other individuals may not have any interpretation (i.e., they are uncertain) about the social consensus of bribery in Mexico compared to Texas. They might try to make predictions about the results of a poll of the relevant referent group on their thoughts of offering a bribe in

either Texas or Mexico. But what is the relevant referent group anyway—workgroup, organization, industry, society? Do the referent groups provide conflicting answers that create equivocality?

In addition to equivocality and uncertainty about the "facts" of an issue, equivocality and uncertainty may exist in the abstract rules and principles used in moral reasoning. Kohlberg's (1981, 1984) conventional stage of moral development—where he thinks most adults peak—stresses the importance of adopting the moral standards of others, including society. Kohlberg is less concerned with the specific content of those standards and focuses more on individuals' orientations to rules. But from a practical standpoint, such standards are not always known and clear to individuals, and there may even be conflicts (e.g., general social norms versus a local community). Whose standards apply in these cases? While Kohlberg implies that deontological reasoning is more advanced than utilitarian moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), this itself is a controversial philosophical and psychological claim that does not seem readily resolvable (Thomas, 1997). Even assuming individuals agree on a set of moral standards, figuring out what these standards mean, along with their application, is often so difficult (Sonenshein, 2005; Walzer, 1987) that it may only rarely happen inside organizations.

Ethical Behavior Requires Deliberate and Extensive Reasoning

Rationalist approaches assume that deliberate and extensive reasoning is required to engage in ethical behavior. For example, Street, Douglas, Geiger, and Martinko's (2001) "cognitive elaboration model" posits that when both the motivation and ability to engage in moral reasoning are low, individuals will be less likely to recognize the ethical implications of issues. But when such reasoning is high, issues will be resolved in accordance with rationalist models (e.g., Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986). In short, the cognitive elaboration model claims that deliberate and extensive reasoning is a prerequisite for moral awareness and subsequent (actual or potential) behavioral responses consistent with a moral viewpoint (see also Moore & Loewenstein, 2004).

What remains an open question is how frequently individuals use deliberate and extensive reasoning. After all, research in psychology posits important boundaries to individuals' cognitive capacities (Simon, 1955), and business ethics scholars make related claims about individuals' "bounded moral rationality" (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994). Moreover, social psychological research shows that individuals rarely engage in the deliberate, extensive reasoning proposed by rationalist models (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Instead, individuals engage in mental processes outside their conscious awareness and guidance (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999).

This research, which is beginning to trickle into discussions about business ethics (Bazerman & Banaji, 2004), challenges the idea that individuals reason deliberately and with great effort to respond to ethical issues (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2003). For example, the "bounded personal ethics" model claims that individuals are often unaware of the ethical implications of their actions, which leads them to favor their self-interest (Murnighan, Cantelon, & Elyashiv, 2001). But the current literature shows a general belief that *satisfactory* responses (actual or potential behaviors consistent with a moral viewpoint) cannot emerge from anything other than deliberate and extensive reasoning (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004; Street et al., 2001).

Objectivity, Construction, and Interpretation

Issue-contingent models are predicated on the idea that previous research does not do more "than hint that characteristics of the moral issue itself will affect the moral decision-making process" (Jones 1991: 369). This observation was intended to point out a limitation in prior research—namely, that individuals will "decide and behave in the same manner whether the issue is the theft of a few supplies . . . or the release of a dangerous product" (Jones 1991: 371). However, to make this claim, it became necessary to emphasize the properties of issues (i.e., moral intensity [Jones, 1991]). In fact, rationalist approaches sometimes suggest that the "process begins with a problem" (Jones, 1991: 380) and that "the individual reacts to an ethical dilemma" (Treviño, 1986: 602). This emphasizes the properties of issues, which exist prior to (and independent of) individuals' actions. Whether

ethical issues are actually out there and indicated by a set of objective indicators (such as moral intensity) is a deep philosophical question that takes the reader into debates between realist and antirealist ontologies. My purpose is not to settle this important question here (see Fairclough, 2005, and Tsoukas, 2000). Instead, I posit the more tempered (epistemological and not ontological) claim that even if ethical issues are mind independent, individuals can still differ in how they interpret such issues (Best, 1995) and will do so based on their motivations and expectations. Accordingly, it is important that scholars study the interpretive processes that construct ethical issues out of social stimuli in the environment.

Research shows that individuals frequently develop subjective interpretations of issues that go beyond the objective features (assuming, for now, that such features exist) of those issues (Ross, 1987, 1989; Ross & Nisbett, 1991) because of their expectations and motivations. Expectations, often encapsulated in scripts, place limitations on what individuals perceive (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gioia, 1992). This challenges their ability to consider all relevant information when making decisions. At the same time, individuals have strong motivational drives that affect how they see social stimuli, making them very partisan actors (Pittman, 1998), often without being aware of it (Griffin & Buehler, 1993).

One way that rationalist models have tried to incorporate the idea of interpretive variation of ethical issues is with the "moral awareness" (Butterfield et al., 2000) or the "recognizing moral issues" (Jones, 1991) phase. In fact, Rest's (1986: 5) model acknowledges that individuals will interpret issues differently, and it even notes that "relatively simple situations" can nevertheless lead to interpretive difficulties. While these parts of rationalist models are more consistent with the alternative I present below, moral awareness is often viewed as binary—you either recognize *the ethical issue* or you fail to do so (Jones, 1991: 380; May & Pauli, 2002: 97). Consequently, research has tended to focus on whether moral awareness is present or absent as a precondition for activating the other stages of rationalist models (Jones, 1991: 383), and not on how individuals construct their own interpretations of "issues" in more nuanced ways.

To further account for differences in perceptions of issues, extensions of rationalist models

have started to move toward *perceived* moral intensity. Singer (1996) concludes that different respondent groups may vary in their weighting of moral intensity components. And Morris and McDonald (1995) criticize Jones (1991) for assuming that moral intensity is issue specific as opposed to based on individuals' perceptions.

Moral Reasoning and Moral Judgment

One of the central tenets of rationalist approaches is that individuals use deliberate and extensive moral reasoning to make moral judgments about how to respond to issues (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Rest, 1986). This view considers individuals to be pensive moral deliberators who are "gathering facts [and] applying moral principles" (Jones, 1991: 384) in order to evaluate a specific course of behavior. Some rationalist approaches acknowledge that intuitions may arise during the early response to an issue, but they consider these "primitive cognitions . . . [as] poor guides for action" (Rest, 1986: 6).

Despite the prominence of deliberate and extensive reasoning in rationalist theories, less clear from empirical findings is the degree to which such reasoning actually occurs. For example, in tests of the managers as philosophers view, researchers asked research participants to rate the likelihood they would engage in questionable moral behavior and then to explain why they made that decision (Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Premeaux, 2004; Premeaux & Mondy, 1993). When respondents answered "against company policy" (Premeaux, 2004: 273), researchers interpreted this explanation as evidence for "rule utilitarian reasoning." But someone simply indicating an explanation for why he or she acted (e.g., against company policy) does not mean that the individual used rule utilitarianism, nor that any reasoning (generally) informed his or her judgment (the "reasoning" could be an explanation that emerged after the fact).

The questionable empirical support for rationalist approaches becomes more problematic when juxtaposed with growing social psychological evidence that "moral reasoning is rarely the direct cause of ethical judgment" (Haidt, 2001: 815). Consistent with this argument is recent neurological research proposing that individuals frequently use nonconscious pattern matching, which recognizes not only the de-

scriptive aspects of ethical issues but also prescribed ways for resolving them (Reynolds, 2006). How individuals respond to issues can come from moral intuitions—immediate reactions that contain an affective valence (good or bad; Zajonc, 1980)—without requiring conscious awareness of the process. Although scholars observe individuals engaging in moral reasoning, such reasoning may be an attribution that creates only the illusion of considered reasoning (Haidt, 2001). Put another way, post hoc attributions can reflect individuals' engagement in sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995), in which individuals infer their own behavior after the fact through self-perception (Bem, 1967).

Moral reasoning serves as a means for individuals to explain/justify their own behavior, but it does not necessarily cause that behavior; indeed, moral reasoning may even be a consequence of that behavior. On this account, individuals' rational descriptions of their judgments can reflect normative standards of how moral decision making ought to proceed—carefully and deliberately (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Rest, 1986). Thus, empirical research that supports such rationalist approaches is subject to an alternative explanation: individuals have intuitive reactions to issues but then engage in post hoc moral reasoning to explain/justify those judgments.

To illustrate the idea of explanation and justification, suppose that a purchasing manager is offered a "payment" to facilitate completing a contract with another company. The purchasing manager has an immediate affective valence come into her conscience (this feels bad) and then acts: she kindly turns the offer down. However, the purchasing manager wants to explain her behavior—why she acted the way she did. In searching for an explanation, she turns to the rational processes often prescribed in resolving moral issues, or decision making, generally (Bazerman, 2002)—for example, abstract reasoning, the consideration of alternatives, complex computations, and so forth. However, these rational processes occur after the purchasing manager intuitively judged that taking the bribe would be wrong—limiting the use of moral reasoning to a way of explaining and/or justifying her response. In the former case, the purchasing manager may start reasoning about the bribe immediately after her judgment as a way of making sense out of why that judgment entered into her consciousness. In the latter case, the purchasing manager uses moral reasoning as a way of providing legitimacy to her instantaneous feeling that something was wrong.[1]

Summary

Rationalist models have made important contributions to the study of how individuals respond to ethical issues. Yet in the preceding arguments I cast doubt on some of the assumptions of these approaches. Organizational life is often equivocal and uncertain, and the very construction of a particular issue reflects (at least in part) each individual's expectations and motivations. I also challenged whether individuals always use moral reasoning and moral principles to make moral judgments and engage in ethical behavior. Indeed, individuals often describe their reactions in rationalist terms, but I offered the alternative theoretical explanation that individuals first use intuitions and then use post hoc (moral) reasoning.
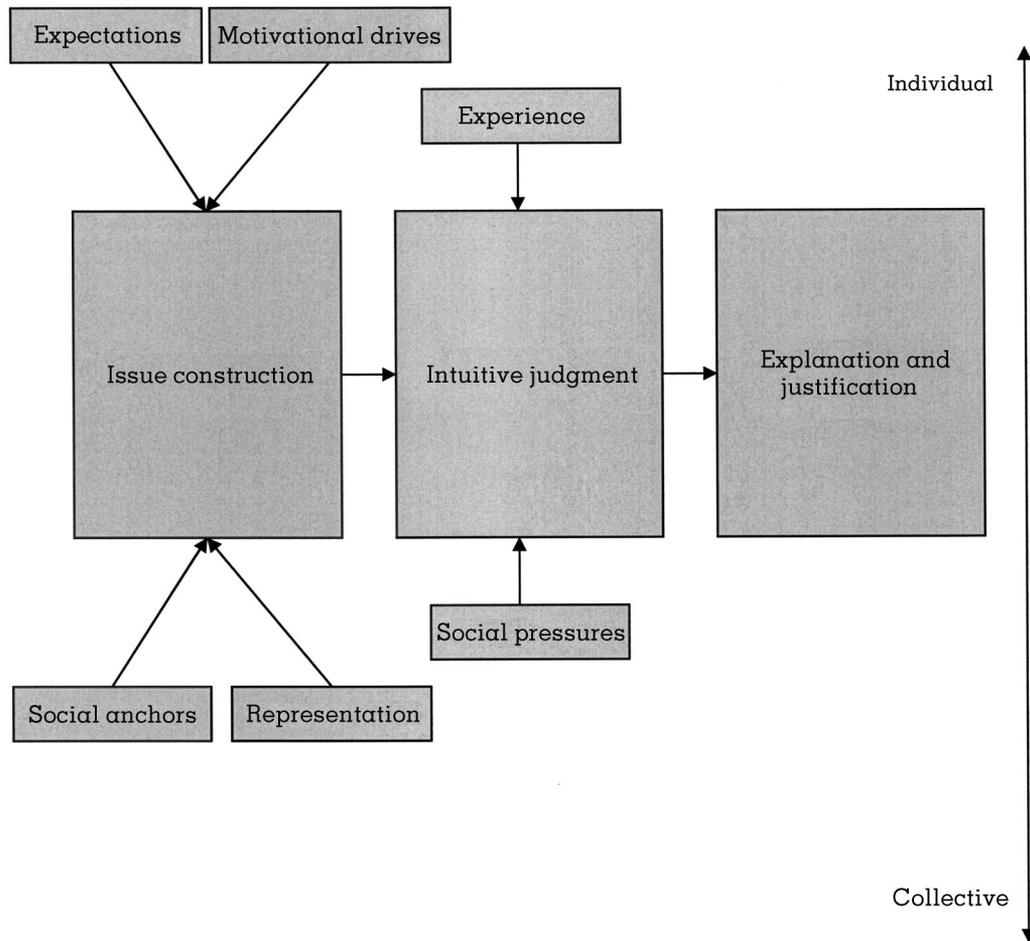
THE SIM

In this section I articulate an alternative to rationalist approaches that overcomes some of the limitations raised above. This alternative perspective, the SIM, is composed of three stages (see Figure 1 for an overview of the model): issue construction, intuitive judgment, and explanation and justification.

Individuals construct issues from social stimuli in equivocal and uncertain environments, and these constructions are affected by their expectations and motivations. Recall that I held in abeyance ontological claims about the mind-independent properties of ethical issues and made the more moderate epistemological claim that individuals will vary in their interpretation of ethical issues (regardless of whether or not such issues truly exist). As soon as an individual constructs an ethical issue, that individual instantaneously makes an intuitive judgment. Such intuitions come from an individual-level factor (experience) and a collective-level factor

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[1] In the case that the purchasing manager has a positive affective reaction (this feels good), she will likely accept the bribe. Here her post hoc justification will likely rationalize her reaction by pointing out that there was nothing morally wrong with it (Ashforth & Anand, 2003).

FIGURE 1
The Sensemaking-Intuition Model (SIM)

(social pressures). After this intuition emerges, an individual explains and justifies his or her response to him/herself and others. Before explicating each phase of the model, I outline two assumptions of the SIM. I then discuss issue construction, intuitive judgment, and explanation/justification.

Starting Assumptions

First, I assume that the SIM is triggered when individuals use sensemaking to respond to conditions of equivocality and uncertainty (Weick, 1995, especially Chapter 4). When equivocality involves multiple interpretations, individuals engage in sensemaking because of confusion—they simply do not know how to mediate among interpretations (Weick, 1995). For uncertainty, sensemaking arises because individuals lack

access to a plausible interpretation—they cannot see (or are unsure) how their actions will affect the future (Weick, 1995). In either case, sensemaking gets triggered because it is difficult to determine a course of action.[2]

Second, while sensemaking never ends—as soon as we make sense of something we must make sense out of that something—individuals

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[2] In cases where individuals tolerate uncertainty or equivocality, they may have an artificially high degree of confidence in what actions to take. As a result, they may develop intuitive reactions (discussed below) to the artificially certain interpretation. In such situations individuals often react in dangerous ways because they cannot create order out of the equivocality and uncertainty in their environments (Weick, 1993). When there is an absence of uncertainty or equivocality, rationalist approaches may have more merit because the strength of social stimuli may overpower individuals' expectations and motivations.

reach temporary resting points where they have a depiction of a social object; they bracket the phenomenon to simplify equivocality and uncertainty and focus on a *plausible* account of an issue that can induce action (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Pressed for time, individuals' search for the accurate answer (assuming that one can even be reached) will stifle action, something encapsulated in the speed versus accuracy trade-off most managers make (Fiske, 1992). However, rationalist approaches seem to discourage such a trade-off, since they require "time and energy" for morally intense issues (Jones, 1991: 384).

Phase One: Issue Construction

Several studies in the rationalist tradition start with the moral awareness phase, which finds important differences in whether individuals recognize issues as having moral implications. For example, Butterfield et al. (2000) found that individuals are more likely to recognize the moral implications of an issue if that issue has more severe consequences. This information processing view emphasizes precoded meanings that invoke responses because they are vivid and salient (Jones, 1991). By "issue construction" I offer a supplemental view of interpretation that focuses on how individuals create their own meaning from a set of stimuli in the environment through stories: "We narrativize our experience almost continually as we recognize unusual or unexpected events . . . and construct stories which make sense of them" (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995: 353). Construction processes are important because individuals make up stories to give meaning to a set of unfolding events in the environment, regardless of whether these stories are accurate (Bruner, 1990). This calls attention to how individuals construct meaning as opposed to detect stimuli (e.g., vivid and salient; Boland & Tenkasi, 1995). As equivocality and uncertainty increase, individuals are afforded more opportunities to go beyond the "facts" (Bruner, 1957) and to construct more idiosyncratic interpretations of social stimuli. I argue that these idiosyncratic interpretations come from individual- and collective-level factors.

Individual level: Expectations and motivations. Individuals' expectations affect how they construct meaning—something supported by so-

cial psychological (e.g., Abelson, 1981; Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Ross & Nisbett, 1991) and organizational (e.g., Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Dearborn & Simon, 1958; Gioia & Manz, 1985; Gioia & Poole, 1984; Snook, 2000) research. In fact, Bruner and Postman note that "perceptual organization is powerfully determined by expectations built upon past commerce with the environment. When such expectations are violated by the environment, the perceiver's behavior can be described as resistance to the recognition of the unexpected or incongruous" (1949: 222).

While this research has not been widely applied to ethical issues (see Gioia, 1992, and Weaver & Agle, 2002, for important exceptions), the same mechanism is likely at play. The presence of uncertainty or equivocality around an issue increases the chances that individuals will go beyond the information given (Bruner, 1957) by relying on their expectations. When individuals rely on their expectations to address an issue, they may overlook the ethical implications of that issue because their expectations at work often do not include moral criteria (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004). For example, economics students, who are educated to think in terms of utility maximization models, are more prone to self-interested behavior than other groups of students (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993; see also Ponemon & Glazer, 1990, for studies of accounting students). The repeated framing of social phenomena (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) around business/economics may lead individuals to overlook that they are facing an ethical issue (see also Butterfield et al., 2000, and Weaver & Agle, 2002). Closing a factory, building SUVs that require more fuel than standard cars, cheating a supplier—all of these can be constructed by managers as "business issues" because their expectations tell them so and because the context of business pushes them in this direction (Kelley & Elm, 2003).

Individuals see what they expect to see, but they also see what they want to see. The underlying psychological process comes from motivational drives, which represent an individual's (unconscious) desires. In one of the earliest studies about how motivational drives lead to differences in perception, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) asked Dartmouth and Princeton students to assess a football game between the two schools. Subjects (students of the respective schools) were given a tape of the football game and

asked to count the number of infractions committed by each team using a set of specific criteria. Despite watching the same clip of the game and having the same criteria for scoring an infraction, the students differed in their estimates of observed infractions, with subjects tending to favor their school (i.e., fewer observed infractions) over the opposing school (i.e., more observed infractions). Hastorf and Cantril concluded that because of motivational drives favoring their particular schools, the Princeton and Dartmouth students were effectively watching different football games. Subconscious motivational drives produce variance in how individuals interpret social stimuli.

Consistent with how Princeton students viewed the Dartmouth team as committing substantially more infractions than the Princeton team (and therefore judged the game as unfair), and vice versa, employees' different goals (e.g., pleasing a boss, getting promoted, etc.) and identities (e.g., preserving social identities) will affect how they construct an issue. For example, suppose that an employee who is vying for a promotion needs to close one more sales deal and therefore subsequently promises a potential client something the organization cannot deliver. This employee may view this promise as slightly exaggerating the capabilities of the organization (with minimal consequences and as consistent with the rules of business), whereas an observer may view such behavior as lying (with serious consequences). Similarly, individuals reframe the meaning of actions to create rationalizations that other members of their group will accept as legitimate (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). For example, other salespersons may accept the "exaggeration account" because of their vested interest in legitimating such behavior (e.g., closing deals and maintaining an identity of integrity). Even if we assume the best of intentions of human actors, they may unknowingly behave in ways that advance their self-interest—a view that explains why accountants cannot objectively audit a firm who also provides large consulting fees to their firm (Bazerman, Loewenstein, & Moore, 2002) or why well-intentioned (but overly optimistic) Enron employees still engaged in unethical conduct (Prentice, 2003).

Collective level: Social anchors and representation. The idea that characteristics of the situation affect individuals' likelihood of engaging in ethical behavior is an important component of some rationalist models (e.g., Treviño, 1986). Jones (1991) also recognized the importance of organizational factors in his model (such as those in Treviño's [1986]), although he viewed these factors as most relevant for the moral intent and behavior stages (3 and 4; Jones, 1991: 391). From my perspective, the important conceptual question to understand is how social influences in a situation affect individuals' construction of issues. I use two key theoretical concepts from sensemaking—social anchors and representation—to address this question.

By "social anchors" I refer to having interlocutors who help an actor test his or her interpretation of social stimuli. Managers rarely rely on others to help them respond to situations that may have ethical implications (Bird & Waters, 1989), for a variety of reasons. First, dominant institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991), such as that business is only about economic performance (Friedman, 1962), may render illegitimate the discussion of issues not directly tied to economic performance. For example, individuals are less likely to champion issues not tied to economic performance (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), and when they do advocate such issues, they reframe them using economic language (Sonenshein, 2006). Second, respect for others' world views may prevent individuals from seeking out social anchors for advice about sensitive issues (Fort, 1996; Greenawalt, 1995). Third, organizations are particularly adept at silencing controversial issues, especially ethical issues (Bird, 1996). Managers often value unity, agreement, and consensus, which may result in the suppression of other viewpoints (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

While dominant institutional logics, social conflict, and general organizational barriers to raising ethical issues may thwart the use of social anchors, individuals can sometimes overcome these obstacles. Because of the equivocality and uncertainty involved in many ethical issues, individuals may seek help from others to understand these issues (e.g., Pentland, 1992). Communication or even friendship networks (Brass, 1984) may provide the medium through which individuals seek out social anchors to access interpretations beyond their own in ways that complicate their understandings (Bartunek, Gordon, & Weathersby, 1983).

A second important concept from sensemaking is representation, in which individuals have a mental model of how others see a situation. For example, in their study of aircraft carriers, Weick and Roberts (1993) found that the staff engaged in representation by understanding how others viewed their roles and the larger system through informal communication. This serves not only to provide individuals with information on others' interpretations but also to broaden their own interpretations. The former facilitates perspective taking (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Parker & Axtell, 2001) by giving actors access to others' cognitive models. The latter suggests that the more an actor understands others' cognitive models, the more he or she can understand his or her own model and behavior. An understanding of one's and others' mental models allows an actor to more comprehensively construct an issue. In lieu of conversations with others, one still may be able to engage in the necessary moral imagination to account for others' perspectives. Werhane's (1999) explanation for why good companies sometimes engage in inappropriate conduct focuses on individuals' narrow perspective on situations. While one may be able to develop a wider band of perspectives through critical thinking, as Werhane suggests, the reliance on other individuals more directly, such as through social anchors and representation, is another approach that focuses less on deliberate reasoning.

Seeking out social anchors and using representation can help broaden individuals' construction of issues, but the effects of these sensemaking approaches likely will vary. On the one hand, having more complicated understandings helps overcome narrow frames of reference so as to better understand the impact of (potential) actions (Bartunek et al., 1983). On the other hand, turning to others (especially during socialization) can lead individuals to follow "role models" who have normalized corrupt behavior (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). These effects are more pronounced when social anchors are intentionally trying to influence others' interpretations of an issue (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, the larger point is that the SIM directs theoretical and empirical questions to understanding when and how individuals vary in their construction of ethical issues. It is not simply a matter of whether or not individuals recognize an ethical issue (e.g., as binary—yes/no) through reasoning. Rather, it is important to understand what *specific* constructions, influenced by expectations, motivations, and others, individuals create to give meaning to social stimuli.

Phase Two: Intuitive Judgment

I noted above that the construction process (at least temporarily) ends when an individual reaches a plausible interpretation. Individuals then develop intuitions—an automatic, affective reaction (Dane & Pratt, 2007) such as "good" or "bad" (Zajonc, 1980). My contention is not that moral reasoning does not happen but that it may occur after an individual has responded to the issue using intuition (I return to this point during the third phase of the model).

Individuals routinely develop intuitions about social stimuli (especially at work [Burke & Miller, 1999]), and while moral reasoning might be used to override an individual's initial intuitions, such "reasoning is rarely used to question one's own attitudes or beliefs" (Haidt, 2001: 819). In fact, research has shown that individuals infrequently change their minds from their initial responses to moral issues, even when presented with new evidence and after engaging in careful reasoning (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Neurological research also suggests that more deliberate cognitive processing is used primarily to rationalize intuitions, rather than to make active judgments about ethical issues (Reynolds, 2006). Accordingly, individuals search for confirmatory evidence and act more like attorneys, attempting to justify their initial intuitions, than like judges, who carefully weigh all available evidence (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

The idea of using intuitions contrasts with rationalist approaches in two ways. First, the SIM proposes that a judgment (i.e., what potential behaviors a person considers morally acceptable) is *instantaneous*. Once individuals have made sense of the issue they are facing, they have an immediate reaction that serves as a moral judgment. Rationalist models, however, argue for much more extensive moral deliberations. As Jones puts it, "The argument presented here focuses on conditions under which efficiency will be sacrificed for a more thorough understanding" (1991: 384). Second, to ground moral judgments, the SIM focuses on individuals' *affective* reactions to issues. I discuss both

differences below and then illustrate a mechanism that links an intuition to a judgment.

Automatic reaction. Dual process theories of attitude change (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Wegener, 1998) claim that individuals have both a high-effort (or central) and low-effort (or peripheral) system of cognition. Low-effort systems are activated when individuals construct issues that suggest equivocal accountability—for example, it is not clear who is ultimately responsible; they are distracted—for example, because organizations predominantly focus on economic, not ethical, performance; or they lack ability—for example, managers are trained to make strategic decisions, not ethical ones (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Street et al., 2001).

Low-effort cognitive systems include intuitions, which often appear *"suddenly and effortlessly* in consciousness" (Haidt, 2001: 818; emphasis added). These sudden and effortless cognitive processes are induced at work because managers often need to rely on quick and instantaneous reactions. Several accounts (Burke & Miller, 1999; Klein, 2002; Way, 1995) portray managerial work as work in which quick reactions are needed and in which managers use experience (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004), such as using pattern matching to a preexisting category (Behling & Eckel, 1991; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Dane & Pratt, 2007). Bazerman and Banaji suggest that "many instances of ethically compromised behavior are either entirely or partially committed in unwitting ways" (2004: 114). In other words, moral reasoning is not faulty, but, rather, individuals do not always directly recognize what they are doing because they are not engaging in high degrees of cognition. I would extend this claim, however, to propose that acts of behavior consistent with a moral viewpoint may also be a function of implicit cognition. That is, individuals develop instantaneous reactions to how they construct issues, and these reactions are pivotal in understanding their responses (acceptable or unacceptable) to issues.

The role of affect. In Plato's *Republic,* philosophers were granted privileged status because of their ability to reason. However, other philosophers have recognized the importance of affect in resolving ethical issues, most notably Adam Smith (2002/1759) and David Hume, who discussed moral sentiments as an "immediate feel-ing and finer internal sense" (Hume, 1998/1751: §1, 3).

Organizational scholars (including business ethicists) also recognize the importance of affect in moral judgments. Margolis (2004), referring to "moral sentiments," argues that individuals have certain moral predispositions, including sympathy, cooperation, conflict resolution, and mutual aid. And Solomon (2004), echoing Adam Smith, considers morality to be found in affect, not only moral principles. Weaver and Agle (2002) note that rationalist approaches (particularly Rest [1986]) may be influenced by two important nonrationalist processes. First, they propose that behavioral scripts from religion (such as the Good Samaritan story) can be subconsciously triggered and can lead to ethical behavior without explicit moral reasoning. Second, they posit that affect (such as moral anger, guilt, or shame) can motivate individuals to redress moral wrongs beyond any moral reasoning.

In psychology, researchers are also increasingly finding empirical support for the role of affect in how individuals respond to ethical issues. In fact, critics of moral development charge that different contexts may activate different kinds of responses to ethical issues (Krebs & Denton, 2005). For example, academic contexts—where rationalist models are often tested—may artificially induce cold, hard, logical reasoning to the exclusion of the more affective responses likely in real-life contexts (Gigerenzer & Todd, 1999). In real-life dilemmas, individuals often know the objects of their moral judgments and have relationships and feelings about them (Krebs, Denton, & Wark, 1997). Consequently, real-life dilemmas often induce a strong affective component (Krebs & Denton, 2005).

Affect can emerge prior to cognitions, largely at a subconscious level (Zajonc, 1980). Individuals simply become aware of a preference for something, prior to engaging in a complete appraisal of that something. These intuitive reactions indicate whether something *feels* wrong or right. Individuals are aware of the outcome of this process—their "gut" reaction to an issue—but remain largely blind as to how they reached that reaction (Haidt, 2001).

Van den Bos's (2003) model of social justice provides further support for the role of affect in responding to ethical issues. He proposes that, under conditions of uncertainty, individuals are

more apt to rely on their feelings about an issue to reach an evaluation of that issue. Affect becomes an important data point for information-starved individuals to make assessments over whether an issue is just (van den Bos, 2003). Consequently, individuals' determinations of what is just are not necessarily a function of rational cognitive process but, rather, are influenced by a "how do I feel about it" heuristic (Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

Intuition and judgment. An important issue is to understand how an intuition (or an automatic reaction based on affect) actually leads to a judgment. The general mechanism focuses on processes of approach avoidance, based on valences (Zajonc, 1980). Individuals routinely develop instantaneous reactions to issues, whether something is good or bad (Osgood, 1962). Positive valences are associated with approach behaviors, whereas negative valences are associated with avoidance behaviors. Tendencies to approach positively valenced objects and avoid negatively valenced ones will result in corresponding judgments about potential behavioral responses: negatively valenced potential behavioral responses are to be avoided, whereas positively valenced potential behavioral responses are to be approached.

Theoretical support for this point can be traced back to Lewin's notion that there is a direct relationship between evaluation and approach/avoidance. Objects have valences that direct behavior in a particular situation, either toward an object—positive valences—or away from an object—negative valences (Lewin, 1935). In more recent research scholars have tested this theory in experimental settings. For example, Chen and Bargh (1999) found that positive evaluations of an attitude object result in immediate approach tendencies, whereas avoidance tendencies come from negative evaluations. For ethical issues, this implies that negative valences can lead to judgments that consider a response ethically questionable, whereas positive valences can lead to judgments that consider a response ethically acceptable.

Where Do Intuitions Come From?

Philosophers (Audi, 2005; Ross, 1930) and psychologists (Haidt, 2001) have debated several possibilities about how intuitions emerge. Here I address experience and social pressures be-

cause of their importance for managerial decision making (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004).

Individual level: Experience. The idea that organizational actors (and especially managers) rely on intuitions goes back at least as far as Barnard (1938), who proposed both "logical" and "nonlogical" processing styles. Since Barnard's proposition, researchers in cognitive science have developed a much deeper understanding of these nonlogical (or intuitive) processes (Simon, 1987). The basic idea is that as individuals develop experience, they can internalize that experience into intuitions (Reber, 1996). Accordingly, individuals with little experience may have few intuitions about ethical issues. These "novices" may follow the more rational, rules-based processes of rationalist approaches during the novice stage (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). But as individuals develop more experience, they advance to "experts." That is, they use less rule-based behavior and rely more on their intuitions, which capture past experiences (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). This suggests that unethical behavior may come from novices, who often struggle with applying the right rule in situations often requiring many rules.

Consider all of the rules that must be followed when driving a car; the action is so complex that it becomes difficult to document all of the rules. But experts think about the action more holistically and respond to changes based on how they acted in past instances. The novice decomposes the environment into discrete elements, but the expert uses interpretation and intuition to understand the environment more holistically. As individuals encounter more ethical issues, I expect them to move toward the expert category. By "expert" I do not mean that they more likely have morally acceptable responses to issues. Rather, they are more likely to make intuitive judgments based on experience and feelings (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004).

Collective level: Social pressures. Moral intuitions develop early. Children participate in cultural practices and imitate others around them (Haidt, 2001). During these formative years, they try to fit in with their peers (as opposed to their parents), and consequently learn about moral values from them (Harris, 1995). While basic principles of right or wrong may be acquired early on during childhood, more specific applications for organizational life may be acquired

inside organizations, which may have distinct ethics (Margolis & Phillips, 1999).

There is little direct research about how organizational actors develop moral intuitions, but one useful place to look is in the socialization literature, which shows that organizations strongly influence how their members behave and what they believe (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). During socialization, individuals may internalize the moral values (or lack thereof) of an organization. For example, Ashforth and Anand (2003) describe how corruption can become normalized inside organizations through trying to fit into a group. Similar to how children mimic early behaviors of their peers to develop moral intuitions, newcomers to an organization may mimic corrupt behaviors to fit into their peer group and to foster a common social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Moreover, managers may displace their responsibility to act morally if they view their actions as stemming from social pressures and if others accept responsibility for those actions (Bandura, Caprara, & Zsolnai, 2000). Alternatively, individuals may mimic moral exemplars (Moberg, 2000). In both cases, individuals' feelings about an issue can be affected by others (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Phase Three: Explanation and Justification

In phase one I argued that individuals construct ethical issues, in equivocal and uncertain situations. In phase two I proposed that individuals then develop intuitive judgments about the construction of an ethical issue. In phase three I now posit that individuals explain and justify their intuitive judgments about the ethical issues they construct.

Because intuitions occur rapidly and subconsciously, individuals are unaware of the process of how they reached a determination about an ethical issue (Haidt, 2001). While they may be unaware of the process, individuals can observe the outcome, including their reaction to an issue and any subsequent behavior. To explain their reaction, individuals make attributions through self-perception (Bem, 1967) by asking such questions as "Why did I react the way I did?"

Organizational scholarship recognizes that individuals often rationalize their actions through the use of socially constructed accounts that maintain a favorable identity in the face of corrupt behavior (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). But

from a sensemaking perspective, such explanations often occur for all kinds of behavior (Weick, 1995). Moreover, these explanations and justifications may include moral reasoning, since there is a strong prescriptive notion (at least in American culture) that individuals ought to use moral reasoning, rationality, and logic to respond to ethical issues (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). As Haidt notes in his critique of rationalist views of morality, "If people have no access to the processes behind their automatic initial evaluations then how do they go about providing justifications? They do so by consulting their a priori moral theories" (2001: 822). Because intuitive judgments about an issue occur rapidly and without individuals' awareness, individuals infer that they must have reasoned in some logical and rational way to reach their assessment of that issue—even if no such reasoning occurred.

In addition to explaining their judgments using moral reasoning, individuals may also justify that judgment (to themselves and/or to others) using moral reasoning. Telling a colleague that one judged a current practice as ethically suspect because of an intuition conflicts with accepted ways of making decisions about ethical issues.[3] To bolster their own confidence in the decision—as well as others—individuals employ the tools of rational analysis, after the fact. That is, they describe their decision in rationalist terms, even if that decision was made without the use of abstract moral principles. The post hoc employment of these rational tools is consistent with findings in a variety of influence literature, including organizational influence (Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995) and issue selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), which claim that rational descriptions of events are perceived as more credible.

Relationship Among the Three Phases

The SIM proposes that individuals construct ethical issues from equivocal and uncertain environments, develop intuitive judgments about these constructions, and then explain and justify those reactions. While I have analytically presented the SIM as a three-phase model, the

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[3] For example, most business ethics textbooks advocate the use of abstract moral reasoning prior to ethical judgment. For an illustrative example, see Donaldson and Werhane (1996).

boundaries among the phases are likely to be blurry. For example, intuitions may emerge during the construction phase, causing individuals to engage in post hoc moral reasoning while they are making sense out of social stimuli. Individuals may also have intuitive reactions to social stimuli without relying on others during the construction phase. In fact, the very idea of sensemaking collapses distinctions between cognition and action (Weick, 1979), making clear bifurcations among stages difficult. My strategy has been to analytically separate the three components to elucidate the model during this early stage of theory development, but empirical research will likely find a more complicated picture.

DISCUSSION

In this paper I have illustrated several important limitations of rationalist approaches to responding to ethical issues and presented an alternative model based on sensemaking and social psychological perspectives. I have shown how rationalist approaches ignore the equivocality and uncertainty present in natural organizational settings and privilege moral reasoning over intuition. While previous research has offered some empirical support for rationalist approaches, this support is subject to the alternative explanation that individuals use moral reasoning as a post hoc explanation and justification of their intuitions. In this section I delineate some of the implications of this paper as it relates to theory, method, and their interaction. Afterwards, I discuss implications for promoting ethical behavior in organizations.

Implications for Theory and Methods

Sensemaking and construction. The sensemaking part of the theory, largely captured in the first (construction) and third (explanation/justification) phases of the model, suggests important changes in how scholars think about individuals' responses to ethical issues. Variation in responses to issues may emerge from how individuals color social stimuli using expectations, motivations, and interactions with others. Surprisingly, researchers know little empirically about these processes of sensemaking, in part because of the research methodologies

(scenario studies) frequently used to study responses to ethical issues.

Because of the short length of most scenarios used to test rationalist approaches and the need for manipulations of the independent variables (e.g., components of moral intensity) to be strong enough to produce variance on the dependent measures, the scenarios often depict situations with less equivocality and uncertainty than in natural settings. This minimizes the role of issue construction (e.g., by framing the issue as a clear choice between X and Y), thereby reducing the chances of detecting important effects based on issue interpretation. But limited and abstract information is likely the norm under the conditions of equivocality and uncertainty more common in natural organizational settings.

Ironically, Rest (1986) acknowledged the difficulties in using scenario methodologies. His Defining Issues Test, which uses scenarios, focuses on moral judgments only because "the very presentation of the moral dilemmas (as written paragraphs or as short vignettes verbally presented by an interviewer) has already precoded and interpreted the situation (already identifying what courses of action are possible, identifying who has a stake in the situation, suggesting what the consequences are of each course of action)" (1986: 9). Moreover, from the perspective of the SIM, even scenarios limited to the judgment phase assume that the situation described is an issue with ethical implications *for the subject* (Marshall & Dewe, 1997), thereby priming those who would otherwise not consider the issue to have ethical implications. Yet these complications have not stopped scholars from using scenarios to test rationalist approaches (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). But if an important part of how individuals respond to ethical issues involves sensemaking, scholars should minimize the amount of precoded interpretation in scenarios or adopt new methods that minimize preconstructed interpretations. For example, scholars can rely on methods that have employees narrativize an issue they face (emulating the construction phase) and examine how different constructions of similar issues affect judgments.

Sensemaking and explanation/justification. Researchers often assume that individuals' post hoc descriptions of how they reacted to an issue map onto forms of deliberate reasoning. But if individuals explain/justify intuitions, scholars

should acknowledge the possibility that post hoc explanations are, in fact, explanations—and not diagnostic of actual responses.

Unfortunately, methodologies used to test rationalist approaches often encourage research participants to make post hoc explanations, but they then treat these explanations as support for rationalist processes. For example, Butterfield et al. (2000) measured perceived social consensus (a component of moral intensity) by asking subjects *after* they made moral judgments to rate the degree of social consensus about an issue. This postjudgment assessment of social consensus was then explained as a *predictor* of moral awareness. However, subjects' ratings of social consensus could have easily emerged as explanations/justifications for their moral judgments, especially given that participants first reported their moral judgments and then only afterwards were asked about the degree of social consensus about the issue.

These explanations and justifications are themselves important indicators of the process of how individuals respond to issues, not necessarily indicative of reasoning. For example, the finding that individuals engage in "moral reasoning" may be a more accurate reflection of normative standards about acceptable methods for responding to ethical issues than it is diagnostic of individuals' actual responses. Scholars can test for such justification/explanation processes by providing "new facts" that invalidate participants' reasoning and then examine if they change a judgment or articulate a new explanation. The continued introduction of new reasons to support the same judgment (despite invalidating information) suggests strong explanation/justification processes.

Moral intuitions. The intuition part of the SIM builds on a growing interest among organizational and business ethics scholars in implicit cognition (e.g., Bazerman & Banaji, 2004). Scholars now recognize that unethical behavior (and, as I argued, ethical behavior) is, in part, a function of psychological processes not immediately accessible to individuals (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004). This perspective points to the importance of generating understandings of responses to ethical issues that thoroughly assess underlying processes (intuition) that may not be observable to individuals (or scholars). To test the intuition phase of the model, scholars can examine the speed with which individuals react

to ethical issues in more natural settings (quicker reactions lend more credence to models such as the SIM) and manipulate affective states (which may influence intuitions but not reasoning).

Toward a unified understanding. My critique of rationalist approaches and proposal of the SIM does not imply that rationalist models should be shunted aside. There are two boundary conditions for the SIM. First, rationalist approaches may have more merit when there is minimal equivocality and uncertainty. Under these conditions, the strength of the social stimuli may overpower individuals' expectations and motivations. Second, when individuals are novices, they may have poorly formed intuitions and may instead follow a more rationalist approach that includes applying rules. Beyond these boundary conditions, the rationalist and SIM models can be complementary ways of understanding how individuals respond to ethical issues, while recognizing important shifts in figure-ground relationships. Rationalist approaches sometimes recognize the importance of affect but treat this as less important than deliberate moral reasoning (Rest, 1986). The SIM reserves an important place for deliberate cognitions during the construction phase of the model but primarily emphasizes intuition after issue construction.

Implications for Practice

The SIM also has implications for practice. First, the SIM calls attention to the importance of developing moral intuitions about issues likely to arise inside organizations. There is growing practitioner interest in how managers develop intuitions at work (Klein, 2002), and various accounts exist about how best to develop such intuitions (Behling & Eckel, 1991; Burke & Miller, 1999; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004). If individuals respond to ethical issues in automatic and affective ways, training individuals to develop more elaborate cognitive processing may not be the most viable way to encourage ethical behavior. Instead, it may be important to recognize that individuals (especially managers [Mintzberg, 1973]) lack adequate time for such reflection and develop their automatic responses to promote ethical behavior, such as via experience.

Second, organizations may be able to increase their capacity to make sense of issues. The idea of complicating understandings is a central tenet of sensemaking research (Bartunek et al., 1983). One way of accomplishing this could be to foster discussions about issues that celebrate multiple perspectives in an organization, as opposed to the more common suppression of opposing viewpoints (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Encouraging collective sensemaking processes may provide individuals with (1) access to a wider variety of interpretations from others and (2) an understanding of the overlap in interpretations among individuals.

CONCLUSION

While scholarship within the rationalist perspective has offered many important insights into how individuals respond to ethical issues, I have raised important challenges to these approaches. These challenges should strengthen rationalist research by having scholars consider alternative explanations and devise fairer empirical tests. At the same time, I also have introduced the SIM as an alternative theory that calls attention to sensemaking and implicit social psychological processes that may be used in individuals' responses to ethical issues. Strengthening the rationalist model and exploring alternative theoretical perspectives are two moves needed in an area of scholarship that lacks adequate theoretical development and often escapes critical evaluation. The SIM will hopefully serve as further encouragement for continuing these important endeavors.

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