



Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive
DSpace Repository

Faculty and Researchers

Faculty and Researchers Collection

2005-05-09

Battling Moral Mediocrity in the Military: An Integrated Proactive Approach to Ethics Management

Sekerka, Leslie E.

Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/38779>

Downloaded from NPS Archive: Calhoun



Calhoun is a project of the Dudley Knox Library at NPS, furthering the precepts and goals of open government and government transparency. All information contained herein has been approved for release by the NPS Public Affairs Officer.

Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School
411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle
Monterey, California USA 93943

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

**Battling Moral Mediocrity in the Military:
An Integrated Proactive Approach to Ethics Management¹**

by

Leslie E. Sekerka, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior & Ethics
Naval Postgraduate School
Graduate School of Business & Public Policy
Ingersoll Hall, #316
Monterey, CA 93943
Phone: (831) 656-2811
Email: lesekerk@nps.navy.mil

Submitted on May 9, 2005 to:
Ethics and Integrity of Governance: A Transatlantic Dialogue
Leuven, Belgium, 2-5 June 2005
Workshop #3: Integrity and Ethics Management

PLEASE DO NO QUOTE WITHOUT PERMISSION OF AUTHOR

¹ **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to Dr. Richard Bagozzi, Dr. Kenneth Euske, and Dr. John Shank as their comments added insight to the progression of this work.

**Battling Moral Mediocrity in the Military:
An Integrated Proactive Approach to Ethics Management**

The action which society labels unethical in the present moment is often really one of no choice. By this standard a lot of guilty people are walking around with an air of innocence that they would not have if society were able always to pin the label “unethical” on the failure to foresee and the consequent failure to act constructively when there was freedom to act. –Robert K. Greenleaf

Ethical behavior is typically managed in our organizations through regulatory systems that move to defend and guard against employee wrongdoing. But despite leaders’ best efforts to create an effective ethical defense, moral failure is all too frequent and acts of professional moral courage are the exception rather than the norm. It should be no surprise that compliance-based mechanisms achieve only a moral baseline, as defensive routines serve as a starting point for ethical behavior but do not drive proactive moral action. While rules serve to inform how to prevent wrongdoing, they do not describe, direct, or advance moral excellence. If organizations hope to win the battle over moral mediocrity perhaps it is time to consider a more integrated approach to ethics management. To elevate moral excellence in the workplace, perhaps we need to augment our existing programs, focusing on not only the means to avoid unethical action but as a way to promote moral action as well.

While ongoing conceptual discourse has addressed issues, concerns, and ideas for how to improve regulatory systems of ethics management (Copeland, 2003; Phillips, 2002; Vershoor, 2004, 1993; Moriarity, 2000), moral failure continues to emerge in both civilian and military sectors. Such events have led to corrective measures and public outcries, but have not resulted in sustained proactive measures to instill moral excellence. In accordance with the tenants of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; see also Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), this discussion

attempts to elevate our understanding of the contexts and behaviors that represent the best of human functioning. While I do not ignore unethical behavior, my focus is on what promotes moral excellence. By assuming this stance I hope to create a more integrated understanding of ethics management and add value to prior research. If we aspire to create organizations that flourish, understanding how moral excellence is created and sustained in the workplace is essential. While scholars continue to probe the contours of ethics management from traditional compliance-based standards, I contend that if we expect advance ethical behavior toward moral excellence our current defensive oriented systems must be complemented with more offensive strategies.

To advance this goal, much can be learned by examining how individuals in heavily regulated environments move to engage in moral action. The military provides an ideal organizational context, as it imposes a judicial baseline to ensure moral action and its members adopt professional values that include moral courage. Given their organizational constraints, how might officers fuel the desire to engage in moral action? I apply existing theory to address this research question: ***What internal mechanisms help individuals move toward morally courageous action in highly regulated organizational environments?***

I begin with a consideration of how organizations manage ethical behavior based upon the control of wrongdoing. I then turn to the individual and describe an ideal form of ethical behavior, professional moral courage. Regulation focus theory is used to explain how an individual's regulation focus orientation may promote or curtail their desire to engage in moral action, particularly in highly regulated organizational environments. Personal governance techniques are suggested as a means to help

individuals overcome external and internal forces that may suppress the desire to engage. Propositions are presented with a corresponding model to depict how individuals can move beyond organizational defensive routines and take a more proactive stance as a habit of choice.

Ethics Management

To exceed moral mediocrity we must first define the baseline. Drawing from Johnson's discussion on *Ethics and the Executive* (1981), the moral minimum is defined as behavior based upon doing no harm to others. Moral excellence, on the other hand, is living to a higher standard. This implies that the individual causes no harm and also assumes responsibility to help reduce harms and/or adverse impacts to others. Therefore, to exceed the moral minimum and move toward moral excellence, proactive efforts are likely to be required.

In the military, officers take an oath to adopt an ethos of moral excellence. In fact, *Title 10* demands that they demonstrate exemplary conduct in all their efforts.² Given that officers are expected to perform at higher standards, how do they move beyond the organization's defensive posturing to proactively engage in ethical behavior? Before turning to individual influencers to address this question it is important to consider the organizational context, as it sets the stage for members' behavior.

Like many organizations, the military's control systems, structures, and processes tend to manage ethical behavior through compliance driven activities. Ethical

² 10 UC 5947: All commanding officers and others in authority in the naval service are required to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Navy, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the naval service, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge.

accountability is typically associated with forms of oversight, thus ethics management is relegated to codes, regulations, and legalisms (Dubnick, 2003). Regulations are based upon what behaviors to avoid. This leaves a great deal of moral responsibility up to each organizational member. Such responsibilities are likely to lack specification and employees can easily find themselves in ambiguous situations where they must choose between difficult options to determine right action. In addition, there may be a naive assumption that moral excellence will happen by espousing the organization's moral values, presuming they will be applied consistently and ubiquitously through directives. Steps have been taken to address this concern in many organizations via the implementation of strategic controls. These processes are designed to drive vision and performance, but may also serve to guard against ethical risk (Simmons, 1995). While such controls can drive innovation and improvement, they can impact culture and potentially ethical behavior as well.

Control processes. Central to organizational control processes are the means to identify areas of risk, including ethical exposures. With this knowledge, routines and procedures are created and embedded into plans and activities to prevent moral failure. These actions work to protect and defend against wrongdoing by dovetailing goal attainment with strategic planning to block wrongdoing. At the General Electric Corporation, for example, managers purposefully integrate an ethics focus (*The Spirit and Letter Integrity Program*) into all of their strategic efforts, including their Six Sigma initiative (i.e., personal conversation with Mr. Ken Meyer, GE, VP Transportation Engines, October, 2004). This ongoing process improvement effort includes identifying areas that possess ethical weakness, then having members address how to prevent these

ethical risk exposures from occurring. While control systems could be viewed as a proactive effort, they are still based upon defensive routines (i.e., to prevent wrongdoing).

Dubnick suggests that while scholars continue to examine efforts of control, studies to demonstrate how ethical behavior is produced through regulation have been largely overlooked (2003). Since his statement, Avsaholom & Rachman-Moore affirmed that regulations are not the driving force in establishing ethical behavior (2004). Their work suggests that the major influence in effective ethics programming resides within the organization's social norms. Coupled with managerial exemplars, social norms are linked with successful ethics management, as characterized by employee attitudes of commitment to ethical behavior. Social norms can be reflected in the behavioral patterns of organizational members that emerge over time. It is important to remember that these patterns are composed of individual behaviors. While behavior is obviously influenced by many factors, social norms and the application of personal and professional values to one's daily actions creates a rich picture which, to some degree, reflects the moral strength of the organization.

Proactive Ethical Behavior. Given that social norms are such powerful influencers of ethical behavior, how can we help create and shape norms to develop workplaces with moral strength? Thomas, Schermerhorn, & Dienhart (2004) propose that leaders must strategically create ethical behavior by engaging in specific proactive *ethics change*. To do so, they suggest that leaders must first assess the costs of ethical failures to instill urgency. Second, organizational members must be influenced to make ethical choices. Finally, integrity programs are needed to help build cultures where ethical norms predominate. Stemming from their recommendations, proactive mechanisms to

complement existing reactive strategies would be useful to create and promote positive organizational ethics change.

Ethics management can shift the moral mindfulness of organizational members in positive directions, but this necessitates social contexts where professional moral courage becomes a clear and compelling norm for all—as a habit of choice. I argue that moral excellence can become a matter routine, but only when mediocre ethical behavior is no longer the acceptable standard. I believe this must commence with educational programming in the area of personal development. But to understand how to effectively educate organizational members, we must learn more about the traits and competencies that may help move members toward moral action in their daily activities. Let us begin by defining an ideal ethical behavior, professional moral courage.

Professional Moral Courage

Morally courageous acts go beyond what is generally demanded by one's professional ethical obligations and can likely require the ability to overcome negative impacts to self (Park, 1998). Often times the individual anticipates that the act will influence a change in circumstance and, rather than placing the primary focus on the self (e.g., *What will happen to me?*), focuses on factors that promote the moral purpose (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2004). Instead of considering personal well-being the individual examines their core standards, values, and principles to determine their action as they face the ethical challenge. It is important that they surmount personal concerns to enact both personal and professional moral values. As Aristotle suggested long ago, courage is both an end and a means to create comprehensive good, asserting that it is the golden mean between reason and action.

Those who exercise moral courage in the workplace may have to engage in actions that defy convention or authority. This is a particularly sensitive issue within hierarchically structured organizations, such as some religious bodies or in the military. In the military, principles of duty, honor, courage, and commitment include adherence to upper level command. There are also unique social norms and complex peer pressures to conform and support other members, which may impact the desire to act. In addition to adhering to inculcated organizational norms, military officers must recognize the ethical challenge, distinguish alternatives, and choose the moral good (Cavanagh & Moberg, 1999).

To demonstrate professional moral courage is to strive for moral good while doing one's job, regardless of significant obstacles. Or, as Solomon (1999) suggests, doing what one knows one ought to do in the face of an ethical challenge. Drawing from these descriptions I define professional moral courage as the ability to choose right action based upon the ethical standards of one's profession, while displaying the necessary moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand negative emotions, risk, difficulty, or threat to self. References to courage throughout this paper are based upon this definition.

Moral Courage in the Workplace

To achieve a more integrated approach to ethical behavior organizational ethics change must include both organizational and individual efforts. The organization serves as the foundation for ethics management, but the rules, like locks on doors, can only provide limited protection. Perhaps a more important observation is that rules provide a clear baseline, yet do not prompt moral action. Until organizations move beyond the codes, procedures, and regulations that are designed to deter wrongdoing, proactive

efforts must emanate from individuals. This underscores the importance of each person developing and applying offensive ethics strategies of their own, as a course of routine. While the adoption of professional moral values may be influential, espousing them does not necessarily make them operative (Argyris & Schon, 1996). To better understand how to elevate moral action at the individual level, prior research has identified important factors that can influence ethical behavior.

Models to describe ethical behavior incorporate theories of planned behavior, reasoned action, and ethical decision-making (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Rest, 1986; Trevino, 1986). Tests of these theories show that ethical behavior is influenced by a multitude of factors such as attitude, perceived importance, subjective norms, situation (Hegarty & Sims, 1979; Weber, 1990; Trevino & Youngblood, 1990; Mayo, Marks, & Ryans, 1991; Dubinsky & Loken, 1989), and characteristics such as moral approbation and moral intensity (Jones, 1991; Jones & Verstege Ryan; 1997, 1998). As researchers continue to edify decision making models, still little is known about what promotes moral excellence, especially in highly regulated and compliance-based environments.

Researchers have examined moral courage in the workplace, studying behaviors of those who speak out against ethical wrongdoings and corporate injustice (e.g., Neilson, 1989; Meceli & Near, 1984; Near & Meceli, 1995; Trevino & Victor, 1992). Morally courageous actions are typically those requiring extreme action such as whistleblowing. My interests, however, are with the every day ethical challenges that organizational members face on a regular basis. If organizational leaders expect moral excellence to be exercised habitually, it is important to understand the means and tactics that impact the desire to execute moral courage as an automatic choice.

Military officers are assumed to possess strong moral values, “Courage is the value that gives us the moral and mental strength to do what is right, even in the face of personal or professional adversity.”³ These values are expected to be applied within their highly regulated workplace environments, contexts that impose a rigorous defense process to guard against unethical activity. An officer’s professional role also assumes a defensive posture, to defend the nation and to preserve its constitution, which is often implemented as the defense of the government and the military itself (i.e., one’s unit and peers). The military system of ethics management is intended to ensure the activation of moral values through controls designed to hold a tight defensive line against moral failure. This is coupled with ethics training that is interspersed throughout an officer’s career (i.e., typically an annual requirement). Yet these efforts do not focus on personal development. Moreover, sincere attention to organizational ethics rarely emerges until there is an episodic event of wrongdoing, which serves as a catalyst for reaction. The system does not provide an integrated program of ongoing moral education, a key offensive strategy to support and cultivate proactive moral action in daily work life activities.

Regardless of whether or not the organization supports moral courage or if officers are prepared to engage in moral action, they are still expected to respond to ethical challenges and are ultimately held accountable for ensuring exemplary conduct. Interestingly, the definition of accountability implies the ability to act effectively without guidance or superior authority (Webster’s, 2004). In the military this is certainly the case, as officers are assumed to be responding consistently with moral excellence. The tension, however, is that to be able to engage in moral excellence the individual must be able to

³ Summarized from the USN Core: <http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/traditions/html/corvalu.html>.

act freely. This is rarely the situation in military organizations. Moreover, regulatory systems are couched in the expectation of dysfunction, driven by reactions to unethical activity and associated with punitive actions. This signals to the officer that he or she should respond to ethical challenges as defined by the presence of penalties (Margolis, 2003). Said differently, curtailing inappropriate behavior does not enable, promote, or nurture right action. Given these considerations, it appears that ethics management in the military serves to support individual behavior based upon legal minimums. Yet the expectation is that officers are held to a higher ethical standard. To better understand what may promote or curtail moral courage in the military, the application of regulation focus theory is useful.

Regulatory Focus Theory

Higgins (1998) describes regulatory focus theory as how one's regulation process operates differently when directed toward different needs. Regulatory focus is an orientation to move toward (promotion) or away (prevention) from a particular goal. Both orientations can contribute to behavioral response actions (Higgins, 1998). Those with a promotion focus seek advancement with a goal to achieve positive outcomes.

Alternatively, those with a prevention focus seek protection with a goal to avoid negative outcomes. A person's trait regulatory focus is their orientation to choose a goal and to pursue it in a particular way. Researchers have shown how regulation focus directs an individual to draw different conclusions and to move and react in different ways (cf. Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995; Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990).

If an individual holds a promotion focus, they are more concerned with achieving

development, aspirations, accomplishments, or an ideal. Individuals with this focus tend to be more concerned with the presence or absence of positive outcomes. With a prevention focus, however, individuals are more concerned with what one ought to do. Individuals with a prevention focus tend to seek protection and safety, with a concern for the absence or presence of negative outcomes. This theory goes beyond the hedonic principle and impacts judgmental processes and goal pursuit beyond fundamental factors of motivation. It is highly relevant to ethical behavior as regulatory focus can influence decision making in a variety of ways. This includes impacting the product of expectancy and value toward goal commitment, counterfactual thinking, generation of alternatives, and evaluation of attitude objects (see Higgins & Spiegel, 2004 for a review).

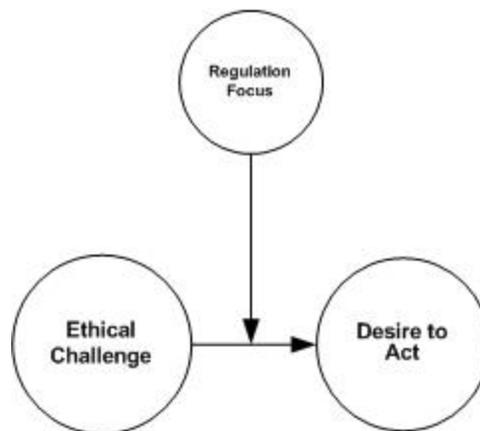
Important for ethical behavior, holding a prevention or promotion focus may be a critical determinant in cognitive processing. Behavioral outcomes are influenced by the effects of one's regulatory focus on components of goal pursuit, emphasizing speed versus accuracy, substituting current activities, changing plans, and adjusting motivational intensity in response to success versus failure feedback (Higgins, 1998). Since regulation focus bears an influence on motivated cognition and has a profound impact on judgmental processes that help shape and determine behavior, it is likely to be salient in the process of moral action.

Through developmental processes, people learn to apply either a promotion or prevention focus to guide their decision making and actions. Individuals solidify their regulation focus as a personal trait, bringing a proclivity to use a particular orientation to their professional daily activities. Once on the job, however, aspects of the organization, such as rules, structures, social norms, and culture, are likely to impose a prevention

orientation onto most individuals. The informal and formal mechanisms that elevate a prevention focus are exemplified in organizations when regulatory and compliance forces are used to govern moral action. It seems likely that only the most adept or “hardened” promotion focused individuals, where this focus is a trait, can retain it once confronted with organizational prevention forces, especially when faced with an ethical challenge.

Organizations oriented toward prevention are typified by members being directed to carry their ethical concerns to a legal officer to procure guidance. This guidance affirms that regulations serve to construct and direct the organization’s norms for ethical behavior. Conversely, a proactive stance, also referred to as the promotion regulation focus (Higgins, 1998), uses the ideal of moral excellence as a target to establish norms. The military prescribes ethical behavior with a prevention focus; that is, they work to discourage moral failure. Therefore, if proactive measures are to be included to encourage moral excellence, it is up to the individual to impose them.

Figure 1. The Influence of Regulation Focus : From Challenge to Desire



If the goal is to promote, advance, or achieve moral excellence through action, a trait regulation focus with a promotion orientation is expected to be associated with the desire to engage in moral courage (see Figure 1, above). Given that an individual faces an

ethical challenge in a highly regulated work environment, and the situation personally affects them, I predict:

Proposition 1: Individuals with a trait regulation focus that is a promotion orientation will be more likely to have a desire to engage in acts of moral courage, than those with a prevention orientation.

Regulatory Fit

People experience regulatory fit (Higgins, 1998; 2000) when their goal pursuit suits their regulatory focus. Individuals sense when they are going against the grain of their natural tendency. When the type of transgression is a regulatory fit violation, participants experience more guilt. But when the means pursued have regulatory fit, people sustain affirmation in their action and their motivation to pursue that goal. This experience can transfer to moral evaluations (Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003).

As described earlier, positive outcomes fit the promotion focus but not so for prevention focus (the reverse is true for negative outcomes). In other words, a desirable choice is more intensely positive for promotion than prevention and an undesirable choice is more intensely negative for a focus on prevention than promotion. Regulatory fit intensifies one's motivation to pursue the goal (Idson, Liberman, & Higgins 2004). Thus, to understand what it means to feel good or bad about a prospective choice, motivational experiences from regulatory fit are influential. Given this information, what forces might cause members to deviate from their trait of promotion focus to a state prevention focus? How might the trait of prevention focus be altered to a situational promotion focus?

To answer this question, consider the performance evaluation structure in the military. Officers' promotions are based upon a strict process limited by quotas. An

officer's fitness report, their performance evaluation, is viewed with an eye predominantly toward achievement. Yet the organizational culture's zero defect tolerance tends to view errors as influential determinants against accession. In other words, a defect on a record typically leads to being "passed over." Therefore, proactive actions are considered risky behaviors. This implies that the weight assigned to achievements and defects may influence regulatory fit, the automatic inclination to impose one's natural (trait) regulatory focus to impose an alternative (state). Assuming the officer is concerned with accession, in accordance with expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964; Nadler & Lawler, 1983) I propose reactions are influenced by performance expectations, potentially overriding regulatory fit and one's trait regulation focus. Given the individual faces an ethical challenge in a highly regulated workplace environment and the situation personally affects them, I predict:

Proposition 2a: Individuals with a trait promotion focus will be more likely to use state prevention focus if they expect performance evaluation to assign greater weight to defects (rather than accomplishments).

Proposition 2b: Individuals with trait prevention focus will be more likely to use state promotion focus if they expect performance evaluation to assign greater weight to accomplishments (rather than defects).

Taken together, we see how the military system to prevent and control wrongdoing, combined with one's regulation focus orientation may influence the desire to engage in moral action. Regardless of the regulation fit, the individual is still held accountable for addressing ethical challenges with moral excellence. Therefore, each individual needs to proactively consider how they will manage these situations in advance. This is where personal governance techniques can play a pivotal role in the ethical decision making process; specifically, use of internal competencies that can support and possibly

bolster the desire to engage in acts of moral courage.

Personal Governance Techniques

Personal governance refers to a group of techniques, resources, competencies, or abilities that can be used by an individual to employ an offensive strategy toward right action. In an ideal scenario, the individual selects and applies personal governance (and other useful processing functions) automatically in their ethical decision-making. If the competency is exercised regularly over time, the value can become second nature, evolving into or becoming engrained as a character trait. Therefore, if personal governance techniques are applied regularly, in time individuals can change their reactions to a situation from being less reactive to being more proactive.

Central to this technique is cultivating reflection (e.g., taking a “time out”), which may be focused thinking on the subject or complete removal from it (e.g., changing activities, exercising, etc.). Some individuals may choose to rest, meditate, or pray, while others may regulate by conversing with others. Informational cues may come to us directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, or by independent means or as a result of connecting with and talking to others. Reflection gives individuals a chance to relax, take stock, gather information, and serves as a portal for personal governance.

With focused attention and self-discipline, individuals can learn to employ these internal mechanisms toward achieving moral excellence. While the ability to reflect and apply personal governance techniques may be established traits for some, there is the potential for further development in most people. By valuing, learning, practicing, and applying these abilities they can become proactive internal resources that can help individuals move toward morally courageous action.

Emotional awareness. Gaudine and Thorne (2001) described how emotions impact ethical decision making and may result in better or worse decisions, depending upon the level of arousal and type of feeling state (i.e., negative or positive). Their argument suggests that individuals experiencing high emotional arousal and positive emotions are more likely to recognize an ethical dilemma. Moreover, positive emotions increase the tendency to select an ethical decision choice consistent with one's prescriptive judgment. Building upon their argument, I suggest that emotional awareness is an important personal governance technique that advances proactive ethics management. The ability to make information stemming from emotions tacit and useful may assist the individual to move toward morally courageous action.

Emotional awareness, not simply feelings but the information derived from emotions, may be beneficial toward making more informed moral choices. Assuming an ethical challenge is recognized and a decision must be made about its resolution (i.e., action/no action), emotions can be used as an individual proactive strategy. Emotions are central to moral action, in that feeling, not just cognition via rationality, are key in generating the motivation to act. When emotions are not viewed as distractions, but as necessary causal agents in promoting moral decisions to act, they can serve as invaluable resources.

Nussbaum (1990) describes how individuals must not dismiss emotions, as they are integral to moral decision making and serve a major role in the system of ethical reasoning. She claims emotions are deeply connected with motivation, therefore closely related to action. Emotions represent and signal our judgments of value, revealing our inner level responses regarding the situation and those around us. Emotions reflect what

matters most to us and how we fit into the world. While feelings may be momentary reactions to particular situations and contexts, they can also endure and become generalized; that is, emotions experienced from prior experiences serve to inform and influence present circumstances as they are rekindled.

Levine and Pizarro (2004) discuss the process of recalling emotions, and how they inform individuals to seek out similar situations in the future or to avoid them (Damasio, 1994; Hendersen, 1985; Levine, 1997; Levine et al, 2001; Robinson, 1980). Emotional memories can be altered by current appraisals of the emotion-eliciting situation. So, rather than being perfectly faithful to the past, emotions also serve as guides to future behavior (Levine & Safer, 2002). When an individual recognizes an ethical challenge, it is therefore likely that they experience a change in the status of their current goal pursuit; there is a disruption in their current path is encountered. Emotions experienced as a result of this disruption can motivate thoughts and actions directed toward maintaining, preventing, or coping with this change. Taken together, we see how affect can serve as a powerful organizing force, not just for behavior, but for perception, judgment, and memory (Dalgleish, 2004).

As individuals develop alternatives for a proactive response action, attending to an ethical challenge, alternatives may or may not comply with one's judgment of an ideal solution (Rest, 1994). Accordingly, the intention to comply or not to comply with one's judgment to resolve the challenge reflects one's willingness to place moral values (e.g., honesty, integrity, sincerity and truthfulness) ahead of other personal values (e.g., career progression, social approval, etc.). Gaudine and Thorne propose that an individual's willingness to place ethical values ahead of other values is primarily influenced by

affective state. I suggest that this influence is more likely to occur when individuals are aware of their emotions, as they have a greater ability to access and use them as a tacit information resource.

If organizational members want to make best use of all forms of information, whether they affirm an emotion and use it to propel or curtail action; emotional awareness can be a valuable asset. Being less aware and informed the individual may or may not be making full use of their personal resources. But awareness of one's emotional reactions is just a starting point, as we must also have the ability to manage these feelings and to appropriately utilize the knowledge cues. This is where there is value in pausing to examine possible avenues for right action and displaying behavioral prudence before acting. I propose that effective movement toward right action is garnered by coupling reflection and emotional awareness. Equally important is the ability to manage these emotions, which I now address.

Self-Regulation. Self-regulation according to Baumeister and Vohs (2004) is the effort made by an individual to initiate or change their response to a given situation. It is somewhat ironic that moral action may be promoted by a form of personal governance known as self-regulation. Thus far regulation has been viewed as a defensive posturing, where the goal is to prevent, guard, or hold back. Self-regulation as a personal governance technique, however, is part of an internal competency repertoire that can be used to support either regulatory focus orientation (prevention or promotion).

Personal governance through self-regulation is the ability to alter one's states and responses (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). Regulated responses can be actions, thoughts, feelings, and desires. In facing an ethical challenge, one's initial reaction typically needs

to be managed. Instead of reacting to the emotional experience itself, pausing to ensure the pursuit of right action requires postponing immediate reaction as well as overcoming potential negative or powerful impacts. This requires control and restraint, coupled with an ability to know when to act.

Self-regulation is a function both key to adaptive success and central to moral action, especially if the latter requires setting aside the pursuit of selfish goals (Baumeister & Exline, 2000). Self-regulation is essential for living effectively, as individuals must restrain certain desires, while channeling others in the pursuit of valued goals (Bagozzi, 2003). So important is this function that Baumeister and Exline (1999; 2000) propose that it may be the master virtue, inasmuch as the process can move individuals to overcome selfish impulses for the sake of the collective. Self-regulation can be used to manage thoughts and feelings, and when activated during decision making processes it may be a means to help individuals utilize incoming cognitive and affective information effectively.

When self-regulation is framed as a personal value, it can become a part of our daily response action or a habit, thus likened to a trait. If an individual selects regulation as a course of action by nature—it becomes automatic. Exercised regularly, over time this use of a personal value is incorporated into our character, evolving into or becoming so engrained as to become a trait. While self-regulation may already be an established trait for some, there is enormous personal development potential for many.

When faced with an ethical challenge, if individuals apply self-regulation, they can purposefully manage their initial reaction; choosing to amend, cancel, override, or postpone their response as deemed appropriate. I consider the application of self-

regulation as the foundation for developing proactive response actions. If organizational members learn how to use this capability in their daily activities, they are likely to be more effective in making ethical decisions. Self-regulation is associated with high degree of ethical commitment (Avsaholom & Rachman-Moore, 2004). Therefore, it can be inferred that as more organizational members are encouraged to engage in reflection, emotional awareness, and self-regulation, this can impact and help shape social norms. As a means to engage in moral courage, self-regulation is likely to be present in effective ethical decision making processes.

Self-Awareness. Research has shown that individuals tend to think they are better than those around them (Kleinke & Miller, 1998). While an inflated view of self has coping and motivational advantages in some circumstances, it may not be particularly useful in motivating people toward ethical action. This is likely the case when inflated ego is combined with internal defense mechanisms that serve to rationalize inaction. Research underscores the value of self-esteem, but individuals must work to ascertain the proper level of self-esteem for well-being and balance. Too little results in lack of motivation and effort and too much leads to excessive pride and social disconnection. The latter can lead to aggression and conflict as well as over zealous performance expectations (cf Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993). The culture, training, and media related to the military claim that members are the best qualified, prepared, most dedicated, and exemplary in terms of readiness and capability. This depiction of organizational membership can potentially lead to excessive pride and an inflated image of self, that can contribute to similar issues associated with excessive self-esteem.

Sometimes we observe contradictions between what people say and do, harkening back to the espoused theories of action versus actual behavior. This can be depicted by arrogance, blind spots, and hubris, potentially resulting in communication breakdowns. A disjuncture in falsely stated and owned values can serve to defer moral action. To guard against this rift, an accurate perception of self must be continually honed, to garner a more balanced understanding of self—and others. Interestingly, individuals who do wrong actually subscribe to the same norms and values as others (Margolis, 2003). Those who waver from right action tend to rationalize their behavior after the fact, as well as neutralizing their wrongdoing in advance (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Bersoff, 1999). The challenge is to be painstakingly mindful of one's self-serving motives in the ethical decision path. Even those of good moral character can inadvertently neutralize their actions while distorting others' behavior to deceive, in order to rationalize selfish goals or to minimize personal shortcomings and erroneous behaviors (Tenbrunsel, 1998).

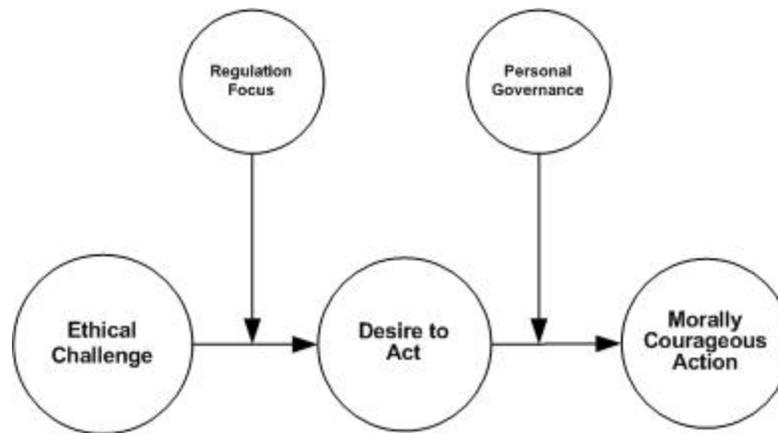
Given the propensity for organizational members to subscribe to social norms and inflate one's view of self. It is important to stay vigilant and be fully aware of one's personal strengths and weaknesses. Individuals must work at being rigorously honest, knowing where their principles of action reside and where they may be relying too much upon espoused values, rather than sincere ownership of them. An ongoing awareness of one's true character through ongoing self-reflection is important for maintaining a healthy awareness of the authentic self. Those who remain thoroughly truthful, taking a daily personal moral inventory, are proactively engaged in ethics management. Self-awareness can make use of both prior moral successes and failures. Personal commitment to engage in moral action is essential, but to do so requires a deep understanding of one's

moral identity. Individuals must establish a conscious awareness of what they will and will not do when faced with an ethical challenge, prior to its presentation.

Taken together, I have outlined how reflection coupled with personal governance can be an internal proactive resource to help individuals move toward morally courageous action (see Figure 2, below). Given that an individual faces an ethical challenge in a highly regulated environment and the situation personally affects them, I predict:

Proposition 3: Individuals who use reflection and apply personal governance techniques will be more likely to engage in acts of moral courage.

Figure 2. The Influence of Personal Governance: From Desire to Action



Proactive Ethics Management

This discussion began with a consideration of how ethics management is typically viewed through the lens of regulation. Given the prevention posturing of the military, social norms may have evolved that inadvertently curtail moral courage in daily actions. Possessing a regulatory system combined with a hierarchically driven structure, where rank status, giving orders, and accession is limited, the military may want to re-examine how professional moral values can be complemented or repealed to bolster proactive

ethics management.

For some time theorists have described how ethical superiority comes from participatory management, an imperative for individually owning ethical behavior (Sashkin, 1884, 1986). Being accountable suggests that each individual assumes the role of responsible influence, the willingness to engage in moral action as a course of routine. This is a necessary stance for proactive behavior, one that can help move ethical behavior beyond the moral minimum. Reliance upon the notion that professional values are adopted and applied is not sufficient. Organizational members must have additional personal development so they can learn the competencies necessary for truly exercising these values. While I specifically targeted practices at the individual level, the organization must also share in this responsibility by providing personal development education and creating workplace contexts that instill, cultivate, and support proactive moral action. If personal proactive efforts are not coupled with organizational efforts to support moral action, the defensive posture will dominate and the organization is unlikely to achieve moral excellence.

The issue of obedience and authoritative control in hierarchically driven organizations creates an inherent tension with regards to ethical behavior. Military officers are trained to obey orders. This may be necessary in the heat of battle or to politically protect a leader, president, or party, but in non-combat situations the need for strict hierarchical compliance is lessened and people must move to act ethically without the biasing constraints of battle or political influence. A baseline policy issue that emerges is how to specify the conditions where a military officer has the freedom to act. Can the organization encourage proactive moral behavior, while it still maintains its

current organizational design, policies, procedures, and the culture that accompanies these traditions? Clearly, this requires extended dialogue and additional research is needed to address this concern.

Conclusion

To move regulated systems toward a more integrated approach, I described the influence of regulation focus and personal governance techniques that may influence the desire to engage in acts of professional moral courage. Specifically, how the prevention or promotion orientation may work to inhibit or advance one's desire to engage. I showed how reflection is a useful resource to foster emotional awareness, self-regulation, and self-awareness; proactive capabilities that may help individuals move toward moral courage. While individual proactive efforts are essential, if we want to change ethical behavior in the workplace, clearly establishing moral excellence as the norm, organizational interventions may be required. Organizational ethics change efforts should begin with a focus on relationships between management, coming together to initiate support. Intervention work requires representation from every level of the organization and all its stakeholders, treating moral excellence as something to be co-created (rather than a problem to be solved). Shared ownership of ethics management will help to establish buy-in and set a course for generative process engagement.

To cultivate and sustain moral excellence with proactive ethical behavior, the organization's systems, structures, and processes must instill and support offensive strategies. Toward this end, leaders need to model proactive engagement and openly discuss, develop, support, and reward daily actions that reflect professional moral courage. Organizational members need to be supported as they learn how to develop and

apply their internal personal governance and hone deeper levels of humility and honesty. Every organizational member and its chief agents need to value and overtly demonstrate moral action, even when such efforts challenge existing management, structures, and traditional processes.

Organizational ethics change in the military will hinge upon complete ownership and commitment from top management. Leaders, decision-makers, and change agents must stand behind ethics management programs and the choices made, see that they are fully implemented, and ensure ongoing personal development at all levels, regardless of reassignment and annual budget politicking. The reality is that if no changes are made at the organizational level there will be little sustained change in individual behavior, and no shift in social norms or culture of the organization. The military will continue to reflect what is sanctioned rather than develop officers to possess moral courage in their daily actions.

Returning to the opening quote, if organizational members take proactive measures to manage their ethical behavior and leaders create a more integrated proactive approach to ethics management, perhaps fewer will organizational members fail to foresee how they can engage in moral action. To instill moral excellence in the workplace, organizational policies must narrow the options to act unethically and take the focus off self-interest. This must be coupled with more opportunities to act with moral excellence and the placement of focus on collective concerns. Given these organizational efforts, combined with individual personal governance, an integrated proactive ethics management effort can grow the organization's moral strength.

Finally, to create a truly integrated approach, current defense measures to prevent wrongdoing should not be abandoned. Certainly a baseline needs to be secured. But organizational ethics change depends upon adding to the existing system. Organizational members must be provided with a context that enables the freedom to act, renders sustained support for moral action, and delivers ongoing personal development education. This will give individuals the incentive, flexibility, and motivation they need to be proactive in their ethical decisions and actions—as a habit of choice. While those who proceed with moral courage can help shape social norms, it is up to organizational leaders to create ethics management programs that include both reactive and proactive strategies, as both are needed to win the battle over moral mediocrity.

References

- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. A. 1996. *Organizational learning II: Theory method and practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Aristotle. 1985. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by T. Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.
- Avshalom, M. A. & Rachman-Moore, D. 2004. The methods used to implement an ethical code of conduct and employee attitudes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(3), 223.
- Bagozzi, R. P. 2003. Benefits and costs of positive and negative emotions: The role of self-regulation. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, and R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship*. San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler.
- Baumeister, R. F. Campbell, J. D, Krueger, J. I. & Vohs, K. D. 2003. Does high self esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(1), 1-44.
- Baumeister, R.F., & Exline, J.J. 1999. Virtue, personality and social relations: Self-control as the moral muscle. *Journal of Personality*, 67: 1165-1194.

- Baumeister, R.F., & Exline, J.J. 2000. Self-control, morality, and human strength. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology. Special Issue: Classical Sources of Human Strength: A Psychological Analysis*, 19(1): 29-42.
- Baumeister, R. F. Heatherton, T. F., & Tice, D. M. 1993. When ego threats lead to self-regulation failure: Negative consequences of high self-esteem. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 64(1), 141-156.
- Baumeister, R.F., & Vohs, K. D. 2004. *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Boisjoly, R. P., Curtis, E. F. Mellican, E. 1989. Roger Boisjoly and the Challenger disaster: The ethical dim. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 8(40), 217-231.
- Bersoff, D. M. 1999. Why good people sometimes do bad things: Motivated reasoning and unethical behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 28-39.
- Camacho, C. J., Higgins, E. T., & Luger, L. 2003. Moral value transfer from regulatory fit: What feels right is right and what feels wrong is wrong. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 84(3), 498-510.
- Cameron, K., Dutton, J.E., & Quinn, R.E. (Eds.) 2003. *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Copeland, J. 2003. Post-Enron challenges for the auditing profession: Accountability *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 69(12), 360-365.
- Dalgleish, T. 2004. Cognitive approaches to posttraumatic stress disorder: The evolution of multi- representational theorizing. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130,228-260.
- Damasio, A. 1994. *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York: Grosset/Putnam.
- Dubinsky, A. J, & Loken, B. 1989. Analyzing ethical decision making in marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 19(2), 83-108.
- Dubnick, M. J. 2003. Accountability and ethics: Reconsidering the relationships. *International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior*, 6(3) 405.
- Dunning, D., Leuenberger, A., & Sherman, D. A. 1995. A new look at motivated inference: Are self-serving theories of success a product of motivational forces? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 58-68.
- Ferrell, O.C., & Gresham, L.G. 1985. A contingency framework for understanding ethical decision making in marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(3): 87-96.

- Ford, T. E., & Kruglanski, A. W. 1995. Effects of epistemic motivations on the use of accessible constructs in social judgment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 950-962.
- Gaudine, A. & Thorne, L. (2001). Emotion and ethical decision-making in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 31(2), 175-168.
- Harrison, D. A. & Shaffer, M. A. 1994. Comparative examinations of self-reports and perceived absenteeism norms: Wading through Lake Wobegon. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(2), 240-251.
- Hegarty, W. & Simms, H.P. Jr. 1979. Organizational philosophy, policies, and objectives related to unethical decision behavior: A laboratory experiment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 64, 331-338.
- Hendersen, R. W. 1985. Fearful memories: The motivational significance of forgetting. In F. R. Brush & J. B. Overmier (Eds.), *Affect, conditioning, and cognition: Essays on the determinants of behavior* (pp. 43-53). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Higgins, E. T. 1998. Promotion and prevention: Regulatory focus as a motivational principle. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 30, 1-46. Philadelphia, PA: Academic Press.
- Higgins, E. T. 2000. Making a good decision: Value from fit. *American Psychologist*, 55, 1217-1230.
- Higgins, E. T. & Spiegel, S. 2004. Promotion and prevention strategies for self-regulation: A motivated cognition perspective. In R. F. Baumeister & K. D. Vohs (eds.) *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications* (pp. 171-187). New York: Guilford Press.
- Idson, L. C., Liberman, N., & Higgins, E. T. 2000. Distinguishing gains from non-losses and losses from non-gains: A regulatory focus perspective on hedonic intensity. *Journal of experimental Social Psychology*, 36, 25-274.
- Jones, T. 1991. Ethical Decision-making by Individuals in Organization: An Issue-contingent Model. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(2): 366-395.
- Jones, T. M., & Verstege Ryan, L. 1998. The effect of organizational forces on individual morality: Judgment, moral approbation, and behavior. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8(3), 431-446.
- Jones, T. M., & Verstege Ryan, L. 1997. The link between ethical judgment and action in organizations: A moral approbation approach. *Organizational Science*, 8(6), 663-681.
- Johnson, H. L. 1981. Ethics and the executive. *Business Horizons*, 24(3), 53-60.

- Kleinke, C. L. & Miller, W. F. 1998. How comparing oneself favorably with others relates to well-being. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 17(1), 107-123.
- Levine, L. J. 1997. Reconstructing memory for emotions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 126, 165-177.
- Levine, L. J., & Pizarro, D. A. 2004. Emotion and memory research: A grumpy overview. *Social cognition*, 22(5), 530-555.
- Levine, L. J., Prohaska, V., Burgess, S. L., Rice, J. A., & Laulhere, T. M. 2001. Remembering past emotions: The role of current appraisals. *Cognition and Emotion*, 15, 393-417.
- Levine, L. J., & Safer, M. A. 2002. Sources of bias in memory for emotions. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11, 169-173.
- Margolis, J. D. 2003. *A few suggestions for preparing for ethical challenges* (white paper). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Mayo, M. A., Marks, L. J., & Ryans, J. K. 1991. Perceptions of ethical problems in international marketing. *International Marketing Review*, 8(3), 61-75.
- Miceli, M. P. & Near, J. P. 1995. The relationships among beliefs, organizational position, and whistle-blowing status: A discriminant analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 27(4), 687-806.
- Milibank, D. 2004, December 31. Lowering the bar on ethics? Critics say GOP is protecting its own. *The Washington Post*, Washington, DC, pg. A. 01.
- Moriarity, S. 2000. Trends in ethical sanctions within the accounting profession. *Accounting Horizons*, 14(4), 427-440.
- Nadler, D. A. & Lawler, E. E. 1983. Motivation: A diagnostic Approach. In J.R. Hackman, E. E. Lawler III, and L. W. Porter (eds.), *Perspectives on behavior in organizations*, 2nd ed., pp. 67-78. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Near, J. P. & Miceli, M. P. 1995. Effective whistle-blowing. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 679-709.
- Nielsen, R. P. 1989. Changing unethical organizational behavior. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 3(2), 123-131.
- Nussbaum, M. 1990. *Love's Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Park, Hun-Joon. 1998. Can business ethics be taught? A new model of business ethics education. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17(9/10): 965-978.

- Phillips, M. 2002. Global rules for corporate accountability: The proposal to establish a corporate accountability convention. *Multinational Monitor*, 23(10), 12.
- Rest, J.R. 1986. The major component of morality. In W.M. Kurtines & J.L. Gerwitz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development*: 24-38. New York: Wiley.
- Rest, J. 1994. Background theory and research. In J. Rest and D. Narvaez (eds.), *Moral development in the professions*. New York: Erlbaum and Associates.
- Robinson, J. A. 1980. Affect and retrieval of personal memories. *Motivation and Emotion*, 4, 149-174.
- Sanitioso, R., Kunda, A., & Fong, G. T. 1990. Motivated recruitment of autobiographical memories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 229-241.
- Sashkin, M. 1986. Participative management remains an ethical imperative. *Organizational Dynamics*, 14(4), 62-76.
- Schachter, S. & J. Singer. 1962. Cognitive, social and physiological determinants of emotional states. *Psychological Review*, 69, 379-399.
- Sekerka, L. E., & Bagozzi, R. 2004. Preparing for virtuous action: Exercising moral courage in response to an ethical dilemma. Paper presented at All Academy Session, *Academy of Management Annual Meeting*, 8/04, New Orleans, LA.
- Seligman, M. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2000. Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 4-14.
- Simons, R. 1995. *Levers of control: How managers use innovative control systems to drive strategic renewal*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Solomon, R. C. 1998. The moral psychology of business: Care and compassion in the corporation. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8(3), 515-534.
- Solomon, R.C. 1999a. *A better way to think about business: How personal integrity leads to corporate success*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stanford, J. H. 2004. Curing the Ethical Malaise in Corporate America: Organizational Structure as the Antidote. *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 69(3), 14-24.
- Sykes, G. M., & Matza, D. 1957. Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, 22 (6), 664-670.

- Tenbrunsel, A. E. (1998). Misrepresentation and expectations of misrepresentation in an ethical dilemma: The role of incentives and temptation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(3) 330-340.
- Thomas, T. Schermerhorn, J. R., Dienhart, J. W. 2004. Strategic leadership of ethical behavior in business. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 18(2), 56.
- Trevino, L.K. 1986. Ethical decision making in organizations: A person-situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review*, 11: 601-617.
- Trevino, L. K. & Victor, B. 1992. Peer reporting of unethical behavior: A social context perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35(1), 38-65.
- Trevino, L. K., & Youngblood, S. A. 1990. Bad apples in bad barrels: A causal analysis of ethical decision-making behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(4), 378-386.
- Verschoor, C. C. 1993. Benchmarking the audit committee. *Journal of Accountancy*, 176(3), 59-64.
- Verschoor, C. C. 2004. Toward a corporation with conscience. *Strategic Finance*, 85(7), 20.
- Vroom, V. H. 1964. *Work and motivation*. New York: Wiley.
- Weber, J. 1990. Managers' moral reasoning: Assessing their responses to three moral dilemmas. *Human Relations*, 43(7), 687-703.
- Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*. 2004. Long Beach, CA: Lexico Publishing Group, LLC.