DECIDING WHAT’S RIGHT: THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL SANCTIONS AND EMBARRASSMENT IN SHAPING MORAL JUDGMENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

We assert that previous research has overlooked the pervasive ambiguity in ethical situations in organizations, as well as how people pierce through this ambiguity to realize new distinctions between right and wrong. Focusing on well-intentioned individuals who unknowingly transgress, we present a theory of how they come to recalibrate their moral judgments. We begin by discussing the composition and nature of a moral judgment. Building on this discussion, we then consider how external sanctions can be used to shift moral judgments. Finally, we posit that internal emotional responses to sanctions (namely embarrassment) will facilitate this shift by triggering a sense of moral deficiency. More specifically, we assert that embarrassment will focus the transgressor’s attention on what went wrong. This reflection provides an opportunity for the recalibration of the initial moral judgment. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our theory.
DECIDING WHAT’S RIGHT: THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL SANCTIONS AND EMBARRASSMENT IN SHAPING MORAL JUDGMENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Behavioral ethicists have been busily trying to discover the root causes of Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and so many other disastrous business scandals of late. Recent reviewers of this literature (see O’Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, forthcoming; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006) have identified numerous individual factors that are correlated with ethically relevant outcomes: personality characteristics, such as Machiavellianism and internal locus of control; demographic factors, such as education and work experience; values and philosophical orientations, such as idealism and deontology; and other individual differences, such as ego strength (or the ability to self-regulate) and cognitive moral development. They also have identified numerous important contextual factors: ethical leadership, ethical climate and culture, and sanctions for wrongdoing. While these recent reviews indicate definite progress in our understanding of ethically-relevant behavior in organizations, many questions remain unanswered and even unasked. Notably, we do not know much about the experience of the transgressors themselves, especially how their moral judgments (or understandings of right and wrong) come to be formed and reformed in organizational contexts or the role emotions might play in this process.

Of course, we concede that most of us enter the work world with many clear ideas of right and wrong: physically assaulting our co-workers is wrong; submitting accurate expense reports to our bosses is right. Nevertheless, what lies below this seemingly straightforward surface is a minefield of ethical hotspots requiring careful navigation. For instance, imagine an office assistant in the mailroom of a school of business whose job entails receiving the mail for the faculty, staff, and program offices of the school, and dispersing this mail to the appropriate
recipients. When a letter arrives addressed to someone unfamiliar to the office assistant, he
diligently attempts to deliver it to the recipient. He asks around to try to determine who this
person is, but no one knows. He then decides to simply open and read the letter to try to figure
out who the recipient is, but the letter is not written in English. Finally, he tells his boss about
the letter, complaining that he has exhausted all means of determining who the recipient is. His
boss snaps at him: “Don’t you know it’s illegal to open other people’s mail?! I think it’s even a
felony. Besides, it’s not your job to read the mail. If a letter’s addressed to someone who
doesn’t work here, just return it to the sender.” Because the office assistant likes his job and
places value on the opinions of his boss, he responds to this criticism with blushing
embarrassment and a new understanding of where the line is between right and wrong (i.e., a
new moral judgment).

Importantly, the office assistant experiences something—input from his boss triggers
embarrassment and a new moral judgment. This is our interest in the current paper: The
experience of well-meaning wrongdoers suddenly confronted with the fact that they have
unknowingly transgressed, at least in the eyes of others. Specifically, we are interested in a
particular response such organizational members might have to sanctions in these instances of
unintentional ethical transgressions—pangs of embarrassment and subsequent revisions of moral
judgments. Thus, we focus on the “conscious experience” (Nagel, 1974) of those who do wrong
and are sanctioned for it. In the wake of the “affective revolution” (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro,
2003), the field of organizational behavior itself seems to be moving toward a greater
consideration of conscious experience especially as it begins to encompass research and theory
on discrete emotions such as embarrassment, anger, and happiness (cf. Lazarus, 1991). We
suggest that the study of discrete emotions is very important to advancing our understanding of
behavioral ethics in organizations not only because “moral emotions” like embarrassment and shame (Lewis, 1993; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999) are natural responses to moral transgressions (Eisenberg, 2000; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Sabini & Silver, 2005), but also because, as argued below, such emotions (particularly embarrassment) help to shape our moral judgments (i.e., our ideas of right and wrong). Assuming that people frequently bungle through situations at work inadvertently misbehaving as they go, understanding how they come to know right from wrong regarding these more subtle ethical issues, especially understanding how organizations might influence the development of moral judgments, is a critical piece of the ethics puzzle.

In the current paper, we shine a light on an often overlooked emotion in the behavioral ethics domain (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000) to argue that “embarrassment,” the distress we experience when we transgress in the eyes of others (e.g., Goffman, 1956; Modigliani, 1968), is a key factor in employees’ developing moral judgments about right and wrong. Embarrassment is both a “moral” emotion as well as a “social” one.¹ It is considered a moral emotion (e.g., Rozin et al., 1999) as it is a natural response to moral transgressions (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Sabini & Silver, 2005), but unlike other moral emotions, embarrassment occurs almost exclusively in the presence of others (e.g., Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996) in reaction to events that threaten a person’s “social well-being” (Leary, 2000), thus making it a social emotion as well. We argue that it acts as a form of social control, letting people know when they have crossed a line, especially in instances of ethical ambiguity in which people look to others to know what is “right”; in this way, it can complement the organizations’ formal

¹ Other social emotions include guilt, jealousy, loneliness, pity, pride, shame, and social anxiety (e.g., Buck, 1999; Leary, 2000; Tangney et al., 1996). Other moral emotions include anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, shame, and empathy (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Rozin et al., 1999). Note that several emotions besides embarrassment fall into multiple emotion categories. Also note that embarrassment is not exclusively a moral emotion in that we can be embarrassed by our non-moral transgressions as well as our moral ones.
systems of control. It is because our focus is on such ambiguous situations that embarrassment is particularly relevant: We are ashamed when others see us engage in activities that we know are wrong, but we feel embarrassed when we are told by others that what seemed innocuous enough to us at the time was actually inappropriate behavior. Given our interest in accidental transgressions, as opposed to more deliberate wrongdoing, embarrassment is the more germane emotion. We assert that while sanctions from organizational members provide initial cues that transgressions have occurred, the degree of embarrassment produced by sanctions can promote not only compliance, but also changes in moral judgments about right and wrong (especially when such change is a matter of recognizing new facts, or beliefs, rather than adopting new principles, or rules). We argue that the degree of embarrassment depends, in part, upon the extent to which an individual feels a sense of affiliation or belonging to the group represented by the source of the sanction. Without such identification, immediate compliance may follow but changes in moral judgments will not occur because the individual has not felt a sense of moral deficiency prompted by embarrassment.

In what follows, we put forth the details of our argument. In the first part of our paper, we provide extensive background information on moral judgments: what they are (a combination of moral rules and beliefs) and existing theory on how they function in the process of moral decision-making. We argue that existing theory is inadequate for explaining how moral judgments are influenced in the organizational situations of interest (i.e., ambiguous situations in which well-intentioned organizational members inadvertently do wrong). In the second part of our paper, we delineate our own theory, explaining why we think that sanctions incurred due to inadvertent wrongdoing are likely to lead to embarrassment (especially when one identifies with the source of the sanction) and ultimately to revisions in moral judgments (particularly when
revisions can be made on the basis of new facts, or beliefs). Our propositions are summarized in
Figure 4.

DECIDING WHAT’S RIGHT

Before presenting our theory of how external sanctions and embarrassment help to shape
moral judgments in the context of organizations, we must first provide the groundwork for our
arguments. This groundwork comprises three major points. The first point is that although
organizational members are often confronted with ambiguous rather than straightforward ethical
situations, behavioral ethicists have largely not considered the former type of situation. Thus, we
know little about what happens when organizational members confront such moral uncertainty.
The second point is that moral judgments consist of moral rules and beliefs; because the latter
seem to be more malleable than the former, we suggest that belief malleability will play an
important role in shifting moral judgments. The third point is that while moral judgment is
typically considered a key component of moral decision-making models and theories, these
models and theories fail to provide insight into how moral judgments might form or shift. These
three points are critical to one another in that understanding the components of a moral judgment
can help us to pinpoint the source of ambiguity in an ethical situation (as ambiguity might stem
from a problem with either the rule component of the judgment or the belief component), as well
as to make predictions about when moral judgments are likely to shift (we suggest that they are
more likely to shift when ambiguity results from a belief rather than a rule). Our subsequently
presented theory serves to expand research on business ethics by incorporating these previously
overlooked factors.

Ambiguity Considered
Currently the empirical research on ethical decision-making in business falls into two broad categories: survey studies in which respondents judge the morality of work behaviors (e.g., Abratt & Penman, 2002; Armstrong, 1996; Boyle, 2000) and experiments in which the effects of individual or situational attributes on behaviors or intentions are examined (e.g., Hegarty & Sims, 1978; Schweitzer, Ordonez & Douma, 2004; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). The former studies give us a sense of how individuals judge particular behaviors, but shed little light on whether, when, or why people will engage in the behaviors judged to be unethical. In contrast, the latter studies serve to answer these questions of whether, when, and why, except that participants’ judgments of the morality of their behaviors or decisions are typically not assessed. That is, we do not know if participants in these studies viewed their behavior as unethical or not. In most cases, blatantly unethical behaviors are used in these experiments with the assumption that participants know that the behavior is unethical; researchers conclude that those who exhibit the unethical behavior do so intentionally. Neither category of studies tells us much about individuals who are trying to “do the right thing” but are uncertain as to what this entails.

While moral ambiguity has not been considered in this line of empirical research, it has been considered theoretically. Jones and Ryan (1998, p. 434) have described the opposite state of affairs (that of moral certainty) as a product of “situations involving unambiguously wrong behavior.” From this description, we can conclude that moral ambiguity is a product of situations involving behavior that is morally unclear (i.e., behavior that is not clearly right or wrong). To demonstrate our use of the term “moral ambiguity” in a workplace situation, we turn to a scenario from the literature that reflects obvious wrongdoing and then modify it so that it reflects moral ambiguity.
Reynolds (2006) used a vignette in which an employee decides not to conduct required maintenance on a company automobile before passing it off to a colleague who then has an accident involving physical injury. This scenario suggests a situation of moral certainty because most would agree that not maintaining the vehicle according to company rules (and therefore endangering the lives of organizational members who use the vehicle as well as others on the road) is morally wrong. In contrast, consider the following modified version of Reynolds’ scenario which depicts moral ambiguity. The employee wants to maintain the company automobile but does not know the firm’s policy on proper maintenance. The employee’s manager suggests that maintenance is not necessary, but the employee has heard conflicting views and cannot find the corporate policy. In this scenario, the employee wants to maintain the vehicle and avoid harm to future drivers, but cannot discover what he or she ought to do. Besides the ambiguity surrounding the morally correct action in our modified scenario, the employee’s desire to do what is right is another important point of departure from Reynolds’ original scenario. Unlike the bulk of past research, which Reynolds’ scenario represents, our interest is in well-intentioned organizational members who are navigating morally ambiguous situations.

Our focus on moral ambiguity perhaps represents more than merely filling a void: it may also represent a philosophical crossroads for behavioral ethicists. As social scientists, we are concerned with describing and predicting what people think, perceive, and do; generally we are not in the business of telling people what they should do. The catch, however, is that while behavioral ethics is descriptive rather than prescriptive, good social science requires a thorough understanding and definition of one’s constructs—researchers only want to predict and describe ethical behavior, but in doing so, they must define what is ethical, and, therefore, they must be in
some sense prescriptive. Often behavioral ethicists avoid this problem altogether by choosing the most obvious or intuitive examples of unethical behavior (e.g., kickbacks, lying, and cheating), and declining to discuss why a particular behavior is unethical or immoral. In this way, behavioral ethicists avoid much of the moral ambiguity that exists in organizations. Unfortunately, such a circumscribed view of organizational life is likely to seriously impede our understanding of ethics in organizations. We see moral judgment as being critical to penetrating the problem of moral ambiguity in organizations. That is, by understanding the nature of a moral judgment (i.e., its underlying moral rule and beliefs), we can hope to better understand the source of ambiguity (i.e., the moral rule or the beliefs). Below we discuss the nature of moral judgments, which like moral ambiguity is an issue that has not been thoroughly considered by behavioral ethicists.

**Understanding Moral Judgments**

In this section we dissect moral judgments in order to discuss their key components: *moral rules* about what is morally right and wrong, and *beliefs* about the state of the world (Baron, 1988; Gert, 2004; Nichols & Mallon, 2006). Knowing the difference between a moral rule and a belief can help us to more accurately specify the source of moral ambiguity. Moreover, given the differences in rules and beliefs, understanding the distinction can help us to predict when shifts in moral judgments are more likely to take place.

**Moral Rules and Beliefs.** When we say that judgments are moral, we are suggesting that they focus on what is morally right and wrong; in our case, we are specifically interested in judgments occurring in the context of organizations. For instance, consider a situation in which an employee illegally loads software on multiple computers. We can imagine that the employee’s manager told the employee to load the software on all of the computers in the office.
Unlike directives such as “put the mouse on the right side of the keyboard,” which would be considered a matter of taste, preference, or local custom as it has no moral relevance, the manager’s request raises a moral issue about intellectual property. We can imagine that a well-meaning employee would comply with this request upon making a moral judgment that it is a permissible activity. Deconstructing the employee’s moral judgment, we find two parts: a moral rule – one should respect intellectual property rights – and a corresponding belief – loading the software on twelve computers will uphold intellectual property rights. The moral rule indicates “what one should do”; its corresponding belief about the state of the world indicates whether the rule applies. Unfortunately, in this example, the employee suffers from a false belief which leads to an inaccurate moral judgment; loading the software on twelve computers, in fact, violates intellectual property rights. If someone were to come along to explain this state of affairs to the employee, and if the employee were to adopt this belief (that loading the software onto twelve computers violates intellectual property rights), then the employee’s moral judgment would shift so that the activity that at first seemed permissible is now understood to be unethical. Thus, both moral rules and beliefs are necessary to moral judgments. Below we discuss in greater detail how moral rules and beliefs (particularly the latter) can lead to “misaligned” moral judgments, a term we use to indicate a judgment that is out-of-sync with those of other people, not necessarily one that is false by some objective standard.

property may be derived from the primary rule of obeying the law. Individuals are thought to possess moral rules such as these either innately or through early socialization. Either origin assumes that individuals possess these rules when they enter organizations, and suggests that they are fairly entrenched. In addition to the problem of entrenchment, changes in moral rules may not be forthcoming due to the nature of rules themselves. In particular, they typically do not lend themselves to fact-based proofs. One cannot produce a graph of empirical data conclusively demonstrating that killing people is wrong or that one should do one’s duty. In other words, because objective facts are not generally relevant, it can be quite difficult to convince someone through the most well-reasoned argument that some moral rules are worth adopting and others are not.

Assuming that moral rules are somewhat difficult to change, we suggest that while it is entirely possible for shifts in moral judgments to result from changes in moral rules, it may be easier to change moral judgments via beliefs. Further, all bad intentions aside, when it comes to well-intentioned organizational members doing wrong, we contend that the source is often misaligned moral judgments (i.e., judgments that do not cohere with those of others) stemming from problematic beliefs rather than problematic rules. In other words, their wrongdoing takes place in a fog of moral ambiguity in which they simply do not realize that the moral rules they hold dear apply. There is many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip; likewise, in spite of good intentions, moral rules can be difficult to apply (i.e., incorrect beliefs can easily lead to misaligned moral judgments despite moral rules being in place).

When Al Gore described the current views of U.S. politicians on issues related to environmental conditions, particularly global warming, he suggested that they are not appreciating relevant facts, and are, therefore, arriving at the wrong moral judgments (David,
Bender, Burns & Guggenheim, 2006). In the documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth,” Al Gore stated, “There are good people who are in politics, in both parties, who hold this at arm’s length because if they acknowledge it and recognize it, then the moral imperative to make big changes is inescapable” (David et al., 2006). He suggested that by not recognizing the facts about global warming, the politicians avoid changes in their moral judgments which would necessitate action. In other words, their moral judgments are erroneous because they do not reflect the facts of the matter. In this case, shifts in moral judgments would follow changes in beliefs.

A change in an individual’s beliefs and, thus, moral judgment in a business setting, is well demonstrated by Ray Anderson, Founder and Chairman of Interface, a large carpet manufacturer. Anderson described his shift regarding sustainability and industry in the book, The Corporation (Bakan, 2004). The following excerpt provides Anderson’s account of his shift in beliefs which occurred when a group of his employees who were concerned about environmental issues invited him to speak about Interface’s mission:

Anderson remembers the moment when his beliefs about the corporation shifted…The difficulty, Anderson quickly realized, was that “I didn’t have an environmental vision…I began to sweat,” he recalls. “Oh my, what to say?” Desperate for material and inspiration, he began to read a book about ecology. There he came across the phrase “the death of birth,” a description of species extinction. “It was a point of a spear into my chest,” he now recalls, “and I read on. And the spear went deeper, and it became an epiphanal experience, a total change of mind-set for myself and a change of paradigm.” “We’re all sinners. We’re all sinners,” says Anderson today of his position as a corporate chief. “Someday people like me will end up in jail.” But he now rejects as dangerously misguided the beliefs he once shared with the large majority of business leaders – “That
nature is unlimited, the earth…a limitless source for raw material. A limitless sink into which we can send our poisons and waste” (Bakan, 2004, p. 72).

Anderson realized his firm’s practices were contributing to devastating environmental harm and this belief coupled with a moral rule that the environment should not be harmed caused Anderson to consider whether or not his firm should produce carpets, a luxury item, if they could not find a way to do so without harming the environment. For Anderson, a shift in his beliefs ushered in a shift in his moral judgment.

As Gert (2004, p. 13) asserted, “In everyday life, most moral disagreement is due to disagreement about the facts, including facts about the probability of consequences of the proposed action and of alternative courses of action.” These disagreements can be due to overweighting some facts, while underweighting others. Feldman (2004), for example, described NASA’s preference for quantitative data over qualitative data, a mistake he asserted contributed to the Challenger disaster. He argued that individuals’ judgments were based on “objective” quantitative data indicating that safety objectives were met; qualitative observations of blackened grease indicating O-ring erosion were ignored, and thus did not impact moral judgments. Presuming they all agreed that they had a responsibility to maximize the safety of the Challenger astronauts, their erroneous judgments stemmed from problematic facts (or beliefs), and not from problematic moral rules.

Research on interpersonal influence suggests that our beliefs can be deliberately manipulated by others who may have some stake in our judgments, and that we are susceptible to internalizing information that is obviously false. Deutsch and Gerard’s (1955) replication of Solomon Asch’s conformity studies demonstrated participants’ willingness to accept incorrect information about the lengths of lines from other people; these accepted “facts” adversely
affected the accuracy of participants’ judgments. Yet, we are also certainly capable of weighing evidence and accepting only those facts which measure up. Unlike moral rules, which do not lend themselves to fact-based arguments, beliefs about the state of the world can be swayed on the basis of factual evidence. While one cannot produce a graphical representation of data demonstrating that killing is wrong (a moral rule), one could produce a graphical representation of data demonstrating that cigarettes kill people (a belief).

In sum, misaligned moral judgments can be the result of either problematic moral rules or beliefs or both; likewise, shifts in moral judgments follow either changes in moral rules or beliefs or both. Our assumption is that moral rules are fairly impervious to empirical arguments and more entrenched than beliefs; as such, we suggest that problematic moral rules are less likely to lead to shifts in moral judgments than are problematic beliefs. This rule-belief distinction alone, however, does not provide a very full picture of how moral judgments might shift in the context of organizations; rather, it is a single component in a larger process. In order to gain insight into this process of moral judgment recalibration, we next discuss moral decision-making models which typically feature moral judgment as a key component.

**Moral Decision-Making Models**

A number of competing theories describe how we arrive at morally relevant decisions and behaviors, and they each include moral judgment as a component. Here we review the progression of thought on moral decision-making from the rational, reason-oriented traditional models to the more recent intuition-based models. Although the more recent models make progress in understanding what roles emotions play in moral judgment (an interest of ours in the current paper), both types of models fall short in explaining how stimuli change moral judgment.
We conclude this section by integrating pieces of rational and intuitionist theories in order to understand shifts in moral judgments.

**Rationalist Models.** One of the best known bodies of research in the rationalist tradition is that advanced by Kohlberg who began by building on Piaget’s study of moral development in children (Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1965). Using his own studies of reasoning, Kohlberg introduced six stages of cognitive moral development that started with consequence-oriented reasoning and advanced to a rule-oriented form of reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969). The bulk of his research focused on how individuals reason through moral dilemmas but mentioned little about the judgments themselves and the behaviors that follow. As Darley & Shultz (1990) noted, Kohlberg was more interested in the moral reasoning aspects of judgment than the actual judgment itself. Kohlberg’s work has been refined and advanced by many, most notably by Rest (1983) who moved beyond the reasoning process to advance a broader model that links moral reasoning to moral behavior. Rest’s model predicts that moral behavior results from a four part process which includes (1) identifying a situation as a moral one, (2) deciding what moral standards are relevant and devising plausible courses of action, (3) considering courses of actions, determining which moral and non-moral values are best served by the different courses and then choosing an action plan, and (4) initiating the plan with careful control over the execution (Thoma, Rest, & Davison, 1991). This model presents a logical sequence of events that aligns with a rationalist notion of decision-making.

When management theorists developed models of moral judgment at work, they followed in the tradition of Rest and Kohlberg. Two widely-cited rational models of ethical decision-making in organizations are offered by Treviño (1986) and Jones (1991). Treviño’s model advances a person-situation interactionist perspective with a strong emphasis on Kohlberg’s
cognitive moral development (see Figure 1). She argued that individuals’ levels of moral
development will influence how they think about an ethical situation, but will not fully explain
how they react in these situations. Instead, numerous individual and situational factors intervene
to influence people’s behavior. For instance, she argued that people behave as they are
reinforced to behave. All else being equal, if people are rewarded for ethical behavior, then they
will behave ethically; if they are rewarded for unethical behavior, then they will respond
accordingly. Essentially, many of the moderators Treviño identified represent relevant pieces of
information one would reasonably consider as one engages in a rational decision-making
process. Jones’ model incorporates the intervening variables Treviño identified, but focuses on
an issue’s “moral intensity,” or the “extent of issue-related moral imperative” (Jones, 1991, p.
132), as a key factor in the reasoning process (see Figure 2). He argued that the moral intensity
of an issue affects each stage of moral reasoning identified by Rest such that the more intense the
issue, the more likely people are to recognize the situation as morally relevant, and the more
likely they are to identify applicable moral standards and act on them. Thus, according to Jones,
moral intensity evokes a greater likelihood of ethical behavior. This proposition reflects a
rationalist perspective: the greater the moral intensity, the more there is at stake should one
engage in unethical behavior, and therefore one should reasonably choose to react to the situation
ethically. While the rationalist perspective has dominated the ethical reasoning literature in the
field of management, this perspective has been criticized in other fields. Notably, recent critics
of this approach have identified the absence of intuition (and, hence, emotion) in these models as
being a key limitation; in response, intuition-based models of moral decision-making have been
proposed.
Social Intuitionist Models. In keeping with the affective revolution, recent moral decision-making models have been developed which center on the way in which people feel about moral dilemmas, or on their intuitions. A strong critique of the rationalist perspective comes from the social intuitionists, who assert that moral judgments do not typically arise from an algorithm of rules and beliefs; rather, they are most often the result of intuition, which includes emotion or a set of emotions (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2001, 2004). For instance, Haidt’s (2001) model (see Figure 3) entails the following propositions: (1) moral judgments come about quickly and automatically through intuition; (2) an effortful moral reasoning process takes place after the occurrence of the moral judgment in order to justify the judgment; and (3) the resulting moral reasoning can be used to influence others’ moral judgments, although others are probably more typically influenced by the affective components of the ethical issue at hand, which triggers their intuitions rather than engaging their rational minds (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2001). To illustrate his point, Haidt (2001) described people’s reactions to a scenario of a brother and sister who decide to engage in sexual intercourse. Haidt removed all opportunities for rational claims that the union of the siblings was morally wrong (e.g., he specified that their involvement was consensual and that they used two forms of birth control to rule out the possibility of offspring). In the absence of such rational bases for claiming that the siblings’ behavior was wrong, most respondents nevertheless were very convinced that the sex was illicit even while they were forced to confront the fact that they were unable to explain why it was illicit. This example suggests the influence of emotion on moral judgment. In the case of sex
between siblings, there is a repulsion that is stubbornly resilient regardless of whether we have reason and rationality on our side; no amount or quality of evidence will convince most people to discard the moral rule that one should not have sex with one’s siblings.

Other recent empirical research suggests the importance of emotion in the process of individuals dealing with ethical issues as well. One such set of studies examines the effects of emotion on moral reasoning and moral behavior by longitudinally examining the deviant behavior of individuals with various brain abnormalities which impair their emotional capacity (Greene & Haidt, 2002; cf. Damasio, 1994). These study findings indicate that impairment to parts of the brain which control emotional responses will adversely affect an individual’s capacity for moral judgment. While the behavior in these studies is quite real (patients exhibiting lying, stealing, and violence in their everyday lives) and the emotional incapacities are well-documented, the causal links among intuition, reasoning and judgment must be inferred.

Research employing fMRI technology allows for stronger evidence of causal links; specifically, studies of brain activity using imaging capabilities provide evidence of the link between moral dilemmas and emotional activity in the brain. Greene and his colleagues (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001), for instance, presented participants with a scenario in which they had to decide whether to save five lives or one life. The participants were told that a trolley was bound for five people standing on a track; if the trolley were to continue on its course, it would hit and kill the five people. Some participants were given the option to divert the trolley to a different track by flipping a switch; this option would result in the death of
one person who was standing on the other track. Other participants were given the option of stopping the trolley before it hit the five people by pushing one person in front of the trolley (which would result in that person’s death). Despite both options entailing the same amount of death (sacrificing one life to save five), participants were much more likely to sacrifice a person by flipping a switch than they were to sacrifice a person by pushing the person in front of the trolley. While participants were able to draw a firm distinction between flipping a switch and pushing a person, moral philosophy (at least that which relies on rationality and reason) is not. Greene et al.’s results indicate that the distinction participants draw may be due to a difference in emotion and speed of processing: in the pushing scenario, the response was faster and it involved more brain activity associated with emotion. From this work, Greene and his colleagues (2001, p. 2105) concluded that “moral dilemmas vary systematically in the extent to which they engage emotional processing and these variations in emotional engagement influence moral judgment.”

Taking together the longitudinal studies of individuals suffering from brain abnormalities and the vignette studies using fMRIs, this research suggests that emotion plays an important role in moral judgments (cf. Damasio, 1994). What we do not know from this research is how emotion affects changes in moral judgments. In other words, social intuitionist models typically focus on a static condition such as reactions to vignettes involving harm to another individual, but we do not know what happens when someone attempts to disrupt the process by intentionally causing an emotion or changing a judgment. Haidt (2001) touched upon shifts in judgments when he discussed the effect of others’ intuitions and judgments on a focal actor’s intuitions, but the influence is conceptualized as a casual, unintentional process – almost a form of contagion. As Haidt (2001, p. 819) explained, “Because people are highly attuned to the emergence of group norms, the model proposes that the mere fact that friends, allies, and acquaintances have
made a moral judgment exerts a direct influence on others, even if no reasoned persuasion is used.” Haidt’s theory does not encompass situations in which others *purposively* attempt to shift a focal actor’s intuitions using stimuli such as sanctions. Because the social intuitionist research is more focused on documenting the prominence of emotion and intuitions in moral decision-making than in the specific ordering of antecedents to judgment, it does not fully explore the acquisition of *new* judgments or *shifts* in judgments that are prompted by the environment.

**An Integration.** We see our theory as sandwiched between the rationalist and social intuitionist perspectives; emotion plays a critical role in the relationships we explore and the behavior we hope to predict, but we also believe that the moral rules and beliefs are more than post-hoc rationalizations. Possibly because the social intuitionists focus on well-entrenched, widely-established moral judgments (e.g., those concerning incest), reasoning may play a smaller role in arriving at the final judgment. In other words, the intuitionists are not seeking judgments from individuals on issues that are new, complex, or have many options. Furthermore, they do not focus on varying emotions and how differences in emotions cause differences in judgments. It is our contention that the emotion of interest to us – embarrassment (which we discuss in detail shortly) – provides individuals with new information regarding personal deficiency or misalignment in relation to the social environment. Therefore, we adopt an approach that incorporates both perspectives by arguing for a model of moral judgment that is prompted by an emotion (embarrassment), which then creates an opportunity via reflection (which entails a process of reasoning) to influence either moral rules or beliefs (particularly the latter) and ultimately, moral judgments.

**Summary**
In short, because moral judgments rely upon moral rules and beliefs, the workplace offers significant opportunities to bridge the gap between abstract societal values and concrete workplace behaviors by asserting that specific behaviors align with beliefs, or that particular moral rules are relevant for a work setting. While individuals enter organizations with a set of moral rules and good intentions, the way in which an individual should apply moral rules in the workplace (an issue of beliefs) is not always immediately clear. To a large degree, an individual is dependent on the local work environment to provide the necessary information for determining which moral rules apply (i.e., individuals’ beliefs are shaped in part by their environments). While most information is transmitted through simple means of communication, standards are not always clearly articulated, possibly because they are tacitly understood and often learned through transgression. The degree to which this is true, that we learn standards best when we fall short of them, suggests that we should look at what happens when an individual violates a standard and is sanctioned in order to understand when individuals update their moral judgments (i.e., internalize the content of the sanction), and when they merely display outward compliance with a sanction (i.e., when they fail to update their moral judgments).

**EXTERNAL SANCTIONS**

In the last section, we discussed the nature of moral judgments and how they factor into moral reasoning. While employees are rarely asked to direct a trolley such that it kills either one or five individuals, they must routinely make decisions and perform acts that have moral relevance. Occasionally these acts do not align with the moral judgments of those around them. In these circumstances, a sanction may follow, the effectiveness of which will vary depending on a number of dimensions that are well documented in the organizational literature. We discuss their effectiveness below.
Sanctions as Signals

In the course of business, organizations are unable to transmit all relevant work information to employees, and employees are equally limited in their ability to absorb and apply all information when it is received. Given these constraints, information is often distributed on a need-to-know basis; sanctions are instances in which individuals find out that they are misaligned with a group or an organization. More specifically, negative sanctions play an important role in transmitting information regarding an individual’s deficiency along some behavioral expectations as well as motivating behavior through the introduction of aversive stimuli or the elimination of positive stimuli (Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980). Most of the major behavioral theories—social control theory, deterrence theory, operant learning theory, and social learning theory—incorporate some notion of sanctions that serve as motivating factors (Bandura, 1977; Hollinger & Clark, 1982, 1983; Manz & Sims, 1981; O’Reilly & Weitz, 1980; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). These theories vary in the degree to which they address the cognitive processes associated with sanctions, but all predict that compliance will follow from sanctions assigned at varying levels and in certain forms. Below we discuss the different types of sanctions and their functioning, but first we offer the following example of a workplace sanction in order to contextualize our discussion. This example is taken from a qualitative study conducted by the first author on “Alpha Trading Firm” (Warren, 2006b).

Alpha employs individuals who trade on the floor of a financial exchange. The exchange possesses several rules meant to govern these trades. The most prominent moral rule held by the financial exchange is that the market should be efficient; the corresponding belief is that market efficiency can be achieved when all traders, regardless of their tenure, have equal access to the trades and state their best market. That is, if all available traders are able to offer markets on a
trade, then the best market will receive the trade and the market system will be efficient. Following this logic, exchange rules and initiatives are oriented towards protecting the distribution of trades such that they are awarded to those who provide the first, most competitive market.

The firm’s method for promoting equal access to the market is to arrange mock trading sessions in which new traders are sanctioned for not stating their markets and thereby demonstrating their equal access. These trainees are harshly rebuked by senior traders at any small sign that they are not offering markets. These are the first author’s observations from one such training session:

During the exercise, a senior trader acted as the leader and ran the exercise while two other senior traders stood alongside three new traders and made hypothetical trades. The leader called out new conditions in the market and the traders responded with markets. When the new traders were slow to respond, the senior traders yelled names at them. One of the new traders was singled out and given more pressure than the other two. At every pause, the senior traders screamed, “What the fuck are you doing here? If you’re not going to trade, leave the crowd. Get out of here!” The statements were repeated. Then, the senior trader insulted the new trader’s appearance. At the end, the new trader stopped trying to respond to the trades and started responding to the senior traders comments. This caused more harassment from the senior traders. The new trader [turning bright red] started to ignore the trades and focus solely on the insults. The senior trader screamed, "You're going to forfeit trades to fight with me!" The new trader became very upset and screamed “Fuck this!” and he ran out of the room. He later returned and sat down quietly….I ran into this new trader several weeks later at the
grocery store and he was still working for the firm and appeared excited about completing the training period and starting in his post-training career.

What was the role of sanctions in training this trader? At the beginning of the training session, the new trader was acting in a way that did not align with the senior traders’ expectations. The new trader was not providing markets and then became distracted by insults from the senior traders. The sanctions from the senior traders were very explicit communications that the new trader’s behavior was unacceptable. The senior traders in the training session, using harassment, conveyed an expectation that the new trader was to make markets regardless of the senior traders’ activities. Their sanctions were deliberate attempts to embarrass the trainee. When the harassment and resulting embarrassment observed by the first author overwhelmed the new trader, he ran out of the room. Afterwards, however, he returned with a compliant attitude. He still wanted to become a trader and now he had learned an important lesson: Trades should be made with respect to the firm’s practices – regardless of the crowd’s reaction and seniority of the crowd members, he should state his market so as to promote market efficiency.

That this new trader was ultimately receptive to cues in his environment about the distinction between right and wrong is consistent with data demonstrating that most adults reach the “conventional” stage of cognitive moral development, which means that they look to important others (e.g., senior organizational members) and societal conventions for guidance when making moral judgments (Treviño et al., 2006). Thus, external cues (like sanctions) are situated to effectively shape most people’s moral judgments. In fact, the social construction of moral judgment is thought to originate in childhood when children learn that their conduct is unacceptable via cues from others (Darley & Shultz, 1990). While children may challenge these
cues (perhaps not unlike the new trader’s initial response to the senior traders’ harassment), they are limited by the existing framework of rules and beliefs. As Darley and Shultz (1990, p. 543) explained, “The moral negotiation process is thus constrained for all participants by the recognition that many of its terms refer to accepted rules and matters of verifiable fact. In learning moral rules a child has considerable leeway to construe the meanings of the complex and ambiguous sanctions he or she observes, but cognitive and cultural constraints operate as well.” Likewise, when employees receive cues that a transgression has occurred, they must make sense of these cues by either challenging them or conforming to them; their responses will be bound by a complex set of constraints including the particular characteristics of the sanctions.

Sanction Characteristics and Functioning

Sanctions in the workplace tend to fall into two general categories—social and economic—and they vary in the degree to which they are part of the formal organizational systems or a product of informal workplace norms. Both economic and social stimuli have received considerable attention in organizational behavior research, and their effects on behavior are supported by a rich set of empirical studies that describe the conditions under which the stimuli will produce desired behavior. Economic stimuli include pay cuts, fines, garnished wages, and other financial penalties (Gomez-Mejia, Welbourne & Wiseman, 2000; Greenberg, 1990; Wageman, 1995; Wiseman & Gomez-Mejia, 1998; Schweitzer et al., 2004; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). Social stimuli in the workplace include expressions of disapproval (e.g., those seen in the trading firm example), exclusion, and suspension of group membership; within each of these categories, the range of behaviors is broad. For instance, those who receive disapproval may be the targets of disapproving looks, verbal attacks, negative emotions, or performance sabotage (Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Rafeali & Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991; Warren, 2006b).
Sanctions also vary in degree of subtlety (e.g., verbal attacks specifying deficient behaviors versus disapproving looks).

Another dimension on which sanctions can vary is formality (see O’Reilly & Weitz, 1980; Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003)—the formal sanctions are mandated by organizations, while informal sanctions are not. This distinction is an important one as informal sanctions have been posited to be more influential in organizations than their formal counterparts (Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001; Holliger & Clarke, 1982; Tenbrunsel et al., 2003; Treviño, 1992). In the first author’s observations of “Alpha Trading Firm,” such informal sanctions were often employed to direct behavior. Although they were not mandated by the firm, one of the firms observed held trader meetings every morning in a conference room before the market opened. The firm manager would go around the room and review all the traders’ positions and the values of their trading accounts. Everyone in the room received a print-out of the accounts. The manager would then discuss them in front of everyone. Importantly, the manager did not have to specifically criticize or sanction anyone for poor performance; an unfavorable comparison with the top earners spoke loud and clear. These messages could grow in strength and severity, even turning towards attacks of character, such as public declarations of their lack of trustworthiness. Included in the study observations is an instance when Ed, a trader, returned to the crowd after being absent the day before. Greg, another trader, yelled sarcastically, "Nothing new happened yesterday. You didn't miss a thing" and stared at Ed. When Ed tried to do a trade, Greg yelled "Dirty!" over and over. In this particular example, an unfavorable move in the market had occurred the day before and Ed’s absence was seen as both intentional and harmful to the crowd: When a trader is absent, the crowd has fewer traders to absorb the poor trades. When Ed attempted to trade the next day, his fellow traders yelled "Dirty!" to discourage
other floor members from doing business with Ed, a signal to him that his behavior was unacceptable.

Sanction severity is a particularly important attribute regarding sanction effectiveness. It is often conceptualized as the degree of negative consequences associated with the sanction (Hollinger & Clark, 1983), and its effects on behavior are well documented in the punishment and sanction literature (Ball, Treviño, & Sims, 1994; Butterfield, Treviño & Ball, 1996; Hollinger & Clarke, 1982, 1983; Hegarty & Sims, 1978; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990; Treviño, 1992). As Treviño (1992, p. 649) explained, “If an individual develops the expectancy that a particular behavior is certain to be detected and punished and that the penalty will be severe enough to outweigh the potential reward of the contemplated misconduct, that person is more likely to refrain from the misconduct.” Thus, severity plays an important role in the effectiveness of a punishment in motivating behavior and learning what behaviors to avoid.

Of course learning does not necessitate direct experience. People often learn vicariously by observing others’ behavior and its consequences (Bandura, 1977; Manz & Sims, 1981). When those consequences are negative, observers are inhibited: They avoid engaging in the offensive behavior themselves in order to spare themselves the same negative consequences (Mischel & Mischel, 1994). Expectations are thought to be critical to this process; that is, social learning is thought to affect outcome expectancies, and, therefore, behavior (Mischel & Mischel, 1994; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Recent meta-analytic evidence indicates the effectiveness of social learning as a training method in organizations (Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005). Evidence of vicarious learning existed on the trading floor of “Alpha Trading Firm” too. Several times, traders told of the stressful day when one angry trader stabbed another in the neck with a
pencil for not following the rules during a trading frenzy. These stories were shared to let others know about possible sanctions and emphasize the lessons learned.

**Sanctions and Deciding What’s Right**

As the above discussion suggests, the literature on sanctions is dominated by a rationalist viewpoint. Generally speaking these theories tend to conjure up an image of organizational members walking around with scales and balances, weighing out their next moves based on things like the severity of past or likely sanctions. This view has its appeal and the models found in this literature are useful for predicting behavior. Nevertheless, this view is lacking in some important ways. First, the connection between sanctions and the components of moral judgment has not been considered previously; below we suggest how they may be connected. Second, the actual experience of navigating the social world and avoiding or perhaps suffering sanctions like those discussed above has not been fully considered. For instance, in predicting which sanction will be considered more severe by people—being suspended or being fired—a rationalist view might suggest that being fired is more severe as it represents the greater financial loss, while an intuitionist view might suggest that the suspension is more severe because it involves having to face one’s coworkers again in the future (a potentially unpleasant proposition likely to elicit negative emotions). The rationalist prediction in this case leads to very different conclusions because under this paradigm, emotion is a byproduct of the cognitive process, rather than an important trigger. Recent research on emotion, however, suggests that this view is a bit antiquated (e.g., Damasio, 1994); emotion is not merely a byproduct of cognition but a necessary component of reason itself. To the extent that emotions are part of our reasoning process they must be important to the development of moral judgments. Below we argue that one specific emotion, embarrassment, is likely to be elicited by sanctions in a particular context (that of moral
ambiguity in organizations) and is subsequently likely to motivate new or revised moral judgments (especially when the misaligned judgment stemmed from problematic beliefs rather than problematic moral rules).

INTERNAL SANCTIONS: EMBARRASSMENT

“The capacity for embarrassment is a link between the individual and his social environment which, once established, permits the environment to regulate his behavior with relative ease” (Modigliani, 1968, p. 313).

For millennia, scholars of psychology have described human beings as social animals (e.g., Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1981). Bundled up in this seemingly simple description are numerous implications, one of which is that in many ways we behave to accommodate others. For instance, we have tendencies to conform to groups and obey authority (e.g., Milgram, 1974); among other things, these tendencies allow external sanctions to be effective regulators of behavior. Such accommodations necessitate a capacity for understanding those around us (their expectations, motivations, etc.); we are capable of such understanding not only through direct and explicit communication, but also through more subtle cues. Indeed, we are also emotional animals with numerous “social emotions,” which are relevant to our interactions with others; in particular, the “social-relational” emotions “…encompass feeling states that arise as a result of how people perceive that others feel about them …” (Leary, 2000, p. 334). Shame and embarrassment, two important social-relational (and moral) emotions, are responses to perceptions of having done wrong and being thus disparaged in the eyes of others (e.g., Leary). Panksepp (1998, p. 27) suggested that these are relatively nuanced, cognitive emotions arising from the primal emotion of “separation distress”; similarly Grandin and Johnson (2005, p. 91) characterized these emotions as stemming from the “pain of isolation.” Sartre’s view that hell is
other people notwithstanding, the sentiment these authors are expressing is that Earth would be a
cold, dark rock without other people to support and accept us, affiliate with us, and so forth, and
that we are hard-wired to avoid this eventuality. The anguish of shame and the squirming
discomfort of embarrassment help to keep us in check and in good standing with others in that
they are punishments that teach us not to behave in ways that will elicit them (i.e., in ways that
others find offensive or immoral).

For instance, in his recounting of the historical case of Phineas Gage, Damasio (1994)
illustrated the central importance of emotion to social and moral life. Gage was a construction
foreman for a railroad company in 19th century Vermont. He was injured when an accidental
dynamite blast caused an iron bar over 3 feet long to enter through his left cheek and push
diagonally through his right frontal lobe and skull; this is where the bar remained lodged. While
Gage at first appeared to not only have survived this incident, but also to have made a full
recovery, it was subsequently realized that after the accident, he was not the same man that he
had been before. His personality had changed, and for the worse. He became foul-mouthed and
undisciplined, ultimately unable to hold a job. Damasio argued that Gage’s most fundamental
problem appears to have been his diminished capacity for experiencing emotions
(embarrassment, shame, and so forth). Thumbing his nose at the considerable intellectual
tradition that holds emotion as the irrationality that invades reason, Damasio argued that
emotions are necessary for social interaction, as well as more broadly for the capacity of human
reason.

While emotions such as shame and embarrassment can be similarly understood as being
functional in the sense that they are necessary to social relations, and more broadly to reason,
they have distinguishing characteristics (e.g., Harris, 2003; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Smith,
Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002; Tangney et al., 1996). For example, shame is more intense and can occur with or without an audience; embarrassment essentially occurs only in the presence of others (Smith et al., 2002; Tangney et al., 1996). Importantly, it seems that they arise from qualitatively different situations beyond the presence or absence of an audience: Embarrassment originates from unintentional transgressions, while shame originates from deliberate actions revealing “…one’s deep-seated flaws both to oneself and to others” (Tangney et al., 1996, p. 1258; see also Keltner & Buswell, 1997). Thus, shame is realizing that one falls short of one’s own standards and the known standards of others (i.e., the harm done was committed knowingly), but embarrassment is realizing that one has fallen short of the standards of others (i.e., the harm done is surprising—it was committed unknowingly).

This distinction is very significant as it implies the difference between knowing right from wrong and being morally ignorant. We feel ashamed when we knowingly act against our moral judgments (e.g., when we deliberately sabotage a co-worker in order to secure our promotion); we feel embarrassed when others point out to us the inadvertent wrong we have done (e.g., when we are told that rather than “helping” a co-worker’s client, we were “stealing” her). An implication of this distinction is that shame is sometimes so painful as to be immobilizing (e.g., Tangney et al., 1996), whereas embarrassment is less difficult to cope with and is associated with attempts to remedy damaged relationships (e.g., Keltner & Buswell, 1997). In the current paper, our interest lies with embarrassment specifically as we are interested in decisions and behavior stemming from moral ignorance in ethically ambiguous workplace situations (i.e., we are interested in truly inadvertent wrongdoing), as well as resulting changes in moral judgments. Our focus on embarrassment is important as some previous researchers have
dismissed it as largely irrelevant to morally or ethically charged interpersonal situations (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000); below we explain why we think this designation was premature.

**The Nature of Embarrassment**

Thus far, we have provided cursory descriptions of embarrassment; before going further, we will elaborate on its nature. Embarrassment is understood to be “a psychological state of disease” (Modigliani, 1968, p. 313) stemming from an individual’s sense of not meeting the expectations of others (Goffman, 1956; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Modigliani, 1968; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Primary causes are thought to be the loss of self esteem due to the loss of esteem in the eyes of others, as well as the damage done to the identity one desires to project (Edelmann, 1981; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Modigliani, 1968; Sabini, Siepmann, Stein, & Meyerowitz, 2000; Tangney et al., 1996). Importantly, embarrassment does not follow from every instance of disappointing others; rather, it occurs when individuals see their transgressions as being somewhat outside of their control—as accidental or as resulting from uncertainty as to how to behave (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Parrott & Smith, 1991). The experience of embarrassment has been characterized as feeling “…funny, awkward, foolish, nervous, surprised…” and as being accompanied by “…the pronounced inclination to laugh, hide, and withdraw” (Keltner & Buswell, 1997, p. 254; see also Keltner & Anderson, 2000). These inner experiences coincide with standard outer displays including blushing, face touching, averted gazing, and attempted smile control (Keltner & Anderson, 2000; Keltner & Buswell, 1997).

Given that the genesis of embarrassment is in the eyes of others (or in our perception of the eyes of others), it is a social emotion; because it concerns our relationships with others, it can be more specifically described as a social-relational emotion (Leary, 2000). However, embarrassment is not merely social; because it often concerns the distinction between right and
wrong, it is also a moral emotion. In fact, morality is thought to have its roots in prosocial emotion and sentiment (e.g., Buck, 1999). This moral designation is consistent with Goffman’s (1956, p. 268) conception of embarrassment: “...the expectations relevant to embarrassment are moral...” in that they involve “...what sort of conduct ought to be maintained....” Again, however, embarrassment does not occur in every circumstance involving morality and other people; very specifically, it is likely to arise with an inadvertent transgression. As the social-moral emotion most likely to arise in such circumstances, embarrassment serves as an important social cue indicating that one’s behavior is problematic and should not be exhibited in the future.

Earlier we indicated that social emotions, including embarrassment, are often viewed as functional in their capacity to regulate our behavior so as to promote our relationships with others (Beer, Heerey, Keltner, Scabini, & Knight, 2003; Edelmann, 1981; Keltner & Anderson, 2000; Morris & Keltner, 2000). Two specific functions of social emotions are to inform and prepare individuals; embarrassment informs individuals that what they have done is unacceptable to others, and it prepares them to ameliorate the situation (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Indeed, embarrassment has been theoretically and empirically linked to compliance (e.g., Tangney et al., 2007). Goffman (1956) originally theorized a relation between embarrassment and face-restoring behaviors whereby embarrassed individuals would act to restore their composure. Experiments have tested Goffman’s original assertions and found that individuals who have been embarrassed are more likely to display helping behavior in order to relieve discomfort and regain composure than those not embarrassed (Apsler, 1975; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Levin & Arluke, 1982). While we have reason to expect that embarrassment resulting from a sanction (a communication of disapproval) to lead to some type of relationship-restoring behavior, previous theory does not indicate whether we can reasonably expect a corresponding update in moral
judgment. Below we argue that embarrassment in this context is likely to result in a recalibration of moral judgment, one that will predict future behavior.

**Sanctions, Embarrassment, and Moral Judgment**

Leary’s (2000) theory on social emotions serves to summarize much of the current thinking on the social emotions (e.g., embarrassment) as well as offering a systematic understanding of how these emotions might be related to cognition and behavior. Leary began with the familiar premise that the need to belong is fundamental to human nature (cf. Buck, 1999). He based this assumption on the evolutionary idea that the survival of the species of human beings has depended on people cooperating. Given this evolutionary necessity, Leary posited that people have adapted by becoming more and more sensitive to whether or not others accept them. He used the metaphor of a “sociometer” to describe our ability to scan the environment for indications that we are being devalued by others and that our relationships with others are in jeopardy. Signs of trouble threaten our self-esteem and elicit negative social emotions such as embarrassment. Once the alarms are triggered and the negative emotion is engaged, attention becomes focused on the problematic interpersonal situation. At this point both affective and cognitive systems are engaged and have reciprocal effects on one another. In the end, the situation is analyzed and a decision is made about how to react (or perhaps not react) behaviorally. In the case of embarrassment, the transgressor often attempts to restore the relationship (cf. Apsler, 1975; Goffman, 1956; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Levin & Arluke, 1982).

Leary’s (2000) theory suggests that people are sensitive to external sanctions such as those discussed previously. To be told that we have done something morally suspect gets our attention, particularly when we never anticipated a rebuke. When sanctions are negatively valenced, they will alert us to our being devalued by others and to the threat of social exclusion.
Not only is our self-esteem likely to suffer, but we will experience negative emotions as well. In our case, the emotion most likely to be experienced is embarrassment, which tends to follow inadvertent transgressions—recall that we are interested in situations of ethical ambiguity, or situations in which naïve actors unknowingly can get themselves into trouble. This embarrassment will guide our attention so that we focus on “what went wrong,” trying to regain our orientation after the shock of being alerted to our moral deficiency. Once adequately oriented, we can work to regain face, as well as our status as morally upright individuals. That is, we can walk away having learned our lesson: What we did was wrong, but now our moral judgments have been updated so we can be better people in the future. Thus, applying Leary’s (2000) theory as well as what we know of the nature of embarrassment, we posit that sanctions in organizations are likely to lead to embarrassment, which, in turn, is likely to lead to updated moral judgments (see Figure 4).

Insert Figure 4 about here.

Yet the outcome of this process hinges on what occurs during the reflection period triggered by embarrassment. The distinction between a moral rule and a belief is critical at this juncture, particularly the proposed greater malleability of beliefs. Upon reflecting on our actions and the ensuing sanction, we may come to realize that we inadvertently violated a moral rule to which we subscribe (i.e., the fault in our moral judgment lies with the belief). Alternatively, we may realize that we simply do not hold the moral rule being evoked by the sanction (i.e., the fault in our moral judgment lies with the moral rule). The greater malleability of beliefs than moral rules (due to the latter’s greater entrenchment and general imperviousness to fact-based
arguments) suggests that individuals may be more likely to align themselves with the source of the sanction when their beliefs are at stake rather than their rules. Convincing us that our beliefs rather than our rules are incorrect is less of a burden on the sanction; likewise, adjusting our beliefs rather than our rules is less of a burden (i.e., less of a shift) for us. Of course another possibility is that we do not find fault with our moral rules or beliefs, and thus our behavior. This line of thinking is unlikely to lead to shifts in moral judgment, although it might result in short-term compliance.²

This basic sequence of events can be seen in the recent scandal suffered by Hewlett Packard (HP). Upon discovering an internal leak, HP’s Chairman of the Board, Patricia Dunn, with the support of the board, ordered an investigation (Sandoval, 2006, 2007). One of the tactics used to investigate was to obtain board members’ phone records under false pretenses (Sandoval, 2006, 2007). Dunn and those involved took these measures in order to protect their shareholders, and they did so believing that their investigation was both legal and in compliance with HP’s ethical standards (Guynn, 2006; Shankland, 2006). That their investigation was problematic and that they had violated board members’ privacy rights became known to Dunn and the others involved only when federal and state authorities launched their own investigations into HP’s tactics, culminating in congressional hearings and felony charges issued by the state of California (Sandoval, 2007). Dunn described this incident as a “major embarrassment” and a learning experience: "If I knew then what I know now, I would have done things very differently" (Shankland, 2006). Through her own admission, Dunn held the wrong beliefs about

² It is important to note that we are not suggesting that individuals necessarily think in terms of our particular terminology (i.e., moral rules and beliefs). Rather we assume that individuals either have different but parallel conceptions of moral rules and beliefs or that they can intuit the difference between a moral rule and belief without consciously realizing that these are distinct concepts. Not being able to articulate this distinction does not preclude individuals from recalibrating their moral judgments.
the legal and ethical approach to investigating boardroom leaks. Moreover, satisfied that Dunn truly thought her actions were legal, California dismissed its charges against her (Ritchel, 2007). For Dunn it was never a question of whether board members’ privacy rights should be respected (a moral rule), rather it was a question of whether obtaining their phone records under false pretenses violated their privacy (a belief). Federal and state authorities stepped in to clarify this point for her: Her investigation tactics violated the privacy of the board members. This point of clarification allowed Dunn to update her moral judgments; likely it allowed others watching these events unfold opportunities to vicariously update their own moral judgments (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson, 1969; Rushton, 1976).

It is the connection between embarrassment and moral judgment that is especially compelling. In essence, embarrassment enacts the internalization of external values and rules, and therefore influences subsequent behavior; in this case, federal and state authorities indicated that Dunn’s beliefs were problematic, and supplied her with a new belief. As Blackburn (1998, p. 131) put it, “… our emotions do not, as it were, finish with a consciousness of bodily and visceral states. Instead, these somatic markers function as ‘biasing devices.’ Eventually, they translate into ticks and crosses on options about which we deliberate, and features of situations that we think about.” He summarized his point by declaring, “Without emotions, the will is rudderless.” Keltner and Buswell (1997) made a similar point in discussing the difference between the human experience of embarrassment and other animals’ experiences of related appeasement emotions. The defining difference is that human beings can engage in abstract thinking which allows us to analyze our embarrassment and to derive from our analysis new understandings of the difference between right and wrong (i.e., recalibrated moral judgments). The subsequent choice to act in accordance with these recalibrated moral judgments (and to
avoid the negative emotions following from acting against them) allows us to exist in relative harmony with others (cf. Damasio, 1994).

Yet our capacity for emotion is even broader than we have suggested. We can *vicariously* learn to expect to suffer the pangs of embarrassment should we decide to engage in an offensive behavior. Barsade (2002) outlined two pathways that can result in emotional contagion (i.e., a process whereby a person or group influences the emotions of others). The first is a “primitive,” or automatic, pathway by which one mimics the emotional states of another (via body language, speech patterns, etc.), and eventually experiences the emotion oneself due to the physiological feedback one receives from one’s mimicking behaviors (see also Barger & Grandey, 2006; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Sonnby-Borgstrom & Jonsson, 2004; Verbeke, 1997). As witnesses to others’ embarrassment, we may well find ourselves blushing and averting our eyes; these actions can elicit certain feelings within us which tell us that we too are embarrassed. In this way we can “catch” other people’s embarrassment.

The second pathway Barsade (2002) outlined is more effortful and is more consistent with social learning notions (see also Sullins, 1991). It entails “perspective-taking” by which one puts oneself in the shoes of another to understand what the other person is experiencing; the other person’s emotion is a source of social information through which one can determine how one “should” be feeling. This second pathway, more than the first, involves a conscious, cognitive appraisal of the situation (see also Sonnby-Borgstrom & Jonsson, 2004). That is, as witnesses to others’ embarrassment, we may be motivated to analyze the situation, attempting to understand what happened. Determining that someone has done something wrong, we might feel embarrassment ourselves as we imagine what the transgressor must be feeling; this feeling of embarrassment, we conclude, is to be expected should we engage in the same offensive
behavior. Because this second pathway is more thoughtful and evaluative than the first, we assume that it is more likely to affect moral judgment, which is a conscious appraisal of right and wrong.

Whether the result of direct experience or a vicarious one, embarrassment is critical in our navigating the social-moral environment; it promotes our learning right from wrong by highlighting to us the morally salient features of the environment, particularly in novel situations like the one faced by Patricia Dunn of HP. Without embarrassment, we suggest that sanctions might elicit immediate compliance, but that they are unlikely to affect moral judgments and, therefore, long-term behavior. What then promotes embarrassment? Below we argue that identification with the source of the sanction greatly increases the likelihood that the recipient of the sanction will respond with embarrassment, as well as subsequent updates in moral judgment.

**The Role of Identification**

Key characteristics of embarrassment are concern for what others think, especially about the image they are portraying, as well as damage to an individual’s self esteem. These factors suggest that one’s identification with the source of the sanction (and the group represented by the source) will promote both embarrassment and updated moral judgments. According to social identity theory, our concepts of ourselves are wrapped up in our connections to groups; that is, we define ourselves in part based on the groups in which we are members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see Hogg, 2006, for a recent overview of the theory). Beyond strictly definitional benefits, being a valued member of a respected group can function to boost our self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Leary, 2000; Turner, 1982; Tyler & Blader, 2003). While group membership entails these perks, they are intangible and can slip through our fingers. Should we fall from
grace, these perks can easily evaporate; alas, we must tread lightly, taking care to notice and neutralize any threats to our position.

As suggested by Leary’s (2000) theory, once individuals are sanctioned (and thus realize they are being devalued in the eyes of others), their attention will turn to the offending event and the relationship in question. We suggest that at this moment at least two fundamental human needs are relevant: the need to maintain social relationships (e.g., Buck, 1999; Leary, 2000) and the need to maintain one’s ego and to think well of oneself (e.g., the self-serving bias; Schlenker & Miller, 1977). For some, these needs may clash in a subconscious tension. While we do have a strong need to belong, most of us also find it very difficult to think of ourselves as “bad people” or as having the capacity to do “bad things” (cf. Aquino & Reed, 2002). For example, many ill deeds are undertaken only after people have manipulated, twisted, and perverted reality until, in their minds, what is wrong becomes what is right (e.g., Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbarabaelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004)—that is, they maneuver their beliefs until violations of moral rules no longer appear to be such. The case of a “surprise” sanction (i.e., a sanction following behavior the agent assumed was above reproach) might produce a tension between promoting the relationship (and therefore humiliating oneself enough to admit one’s wrongdoing to oneself and the other party) and promoting the self (and therefore refusing to acknowledge the harm done). In the latter event, embarrassment will not follow because the required understanding of having done wrong is not present. Other emotions might be relevant, such as anger over an unjust accusation, but embarrassment would not be.

Sanctions need not, however, produce a tension between these needs for belonging and self-esteem. To the extent that one identifies with the source of the sanction (e.g., with one’s organization or department), social identity theory suggests that these two needs are aligned,
both pointing toward submission to the group (see Figure 4). Individuals who identify with the source of the sanction will respond to the sanction with embarrassment because they will believe that they have done wrong and they will be concerned about the damage done to a highly valued relationship; this outcome is more likely when individuals’ beliefs, rather than their moral rules, are at stake. In this sense, they will submit to the source of the sanction through their willingness to see the error of their ways (cf. Tyler & Blader, 2003). In contrast, when people do not identify with the source of the sanction, promoting the self at the expense of the relationship becomes much easier. For these people, their self-esteem is not promoted through group membership; submission to the group does not represent an opportunity to bolster their self-esteem, but only to damage it. Rather than internalize the moral rule of the situation, they may dismiss the entire episode as a “cost of doing business” much like an organization might dismiss the ethical relevance of a regulatory fine (e.g., Barstow & Bergman, 2003; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). Alternatively, they may be a little less composed, and instead respond with anger over the “outrageous” accusation that they have done something unethical. When the moral weight of a sanction does not permeate the internal sanctioning system through embarrassment, we assert that the sanction has little hope of changing the moral judgments of the recipient, much less his or her future behavior.

In describing social identification in the workplace, Ashforth and Mael (1989) were careful to note that identification does not always require behaviors or affect that align with the target group with which identification is felt. As they explained, “An individual may define herself in terms of the organization she works for, yet she can disagree with the prevailing values, strategy, system of authority, and so on…” (p. 22). We also assume that besides a conscious choice to disagree, organizational members are often misaligned with their
organizations due to a lack of information. That is, their misalignment is due to the ambiguity of situations. This disconnect between identification and behavior as a result of ambiguity is what fuels the process of embarrassment; if individuals perfectly internalized all rules, beliefs, and behaviors affiliated with a particular identity, there would be no opportunity for sanctions or embarrassment because one would always comply and would never experience the surprise of a rebuke for what one thought was irreproachable behavior. Embarrassment, bolstered by identification with the source of the sanction, is the critical component of shifting moral judgments as well as future behavior. In essence, embarrassment, and the identification that fuels it, serves as a key component of the connection between group affiliations and moral judgments. Without it, the scarlet letter of a sanction is merely decorative.

Consider, for instance, Adria Hinkle and Andrew Cook, two PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) employees who in 2005 were caught euthanizing dogs in the back of a van and then tossing their corpses into a Piggly Wiggly dumpster under the cover of night (Associated Press, 2005; Ryan, 2007; Smith, 2005). Their actions violated North Carolina state law, and they were charged with 21 counts of animal cruelty (each carrying a possible jail sentence of 15 months) in addition to charges of obtaining property under false pretenses, as they apparently obtained some of the dogs from a veterinarian’s office by claiming to be facilitating adoption (Ryan, 2007). PETA also sanctioned the employees (Hinkle was even suspended), but only because of their disposal methods, which violated PETA protocol (Ryan, 2007). PETA did not take offense to the law-breaking activities of its workers because the actual killing of the animals was an act they saw as coherent with their pro-euthanasia policy: "Critics may condemn PETA for supporting euthanasia, but we are not ashamed of providing a merciful exit from an uncaring world to broken beings" (Ryan, 2007). PETA’s President, Ingrid Newkirk, disputed the
alleged animal cruelty arguing that the animals did not suffer (Associated Press, 2005; Ryan, 2007). Thus, according to the State of North Carolina, the harm done by Hinkle and Cook was in killing and dumping the dogs, whereas, according to PETA, the harm was only in dumping them.

What might have been Hinkle and Cook’s reaction to these discrepant messages? We speculate that due to their plausibly greater identification with PETA than with the State of North Carolina, the former affected their moral judgment, while the latter did not. As an activist group, PETA consists of “true believers.” In Newkirk’s own words, “I believe we should be – and I say this at staff meetings – a lean, mean fighting machine. This is not a rest home for people who just have warm feelings about animals” (Sizemore, 2000, p. B4). Presumably anyone working for PETA truly believes in its cause. Being a member of PETA might indicate something about one’s orientation towards state government as well. In particular, PETA promotes violating the law in order to achieve its ends; where a criminal record is despised elsewhere, at PETA it is a badge of courage. For example, a “Star Activist” is praised on PETA’s website for twenty years of work in which she had “…rescued animals, spayed and neutered countless feral cats, and gone to jail for her beliefs…” (PETA, 2007). By emphasizing the idea that arrests are badges of courage, the organization reduces the power of societal punishment over moral judgment so that the state’s sanction is not seen as a sign of moral deficiency or as embarrassing. At PETA, getting arrested does not make one a bad citizen; it makes one a better member of PETA. Given that identification with the organization, as well as a willingness to rebel against the state, appear to be pre-requisites to membership in PETA, we assume that Hinkle and Cook were embarrassed when Newkirk publicly described the disposal of the animals as “hideous” and “shocking” and likely to impede the good work of PETA (Ryan, 2007), but not so much when the State of North
Carolina charged them with animal cruelty. Correspondingly, we assume that while they have come to believe that dumping dead dogs into Piggly Wiggly dumpsters is not the right thing to do, we imagine that they have retained their belief that it is morally right to end animal suffering by euthanizing dogs in the back of a van.

The theory put forth in this paper explains one way in which moral judgments (consisting of rules and beliefs) can be influenced in organizations. Our theory highlights several pathways that organizational members may follow, particularly those who are well-intentioned and find themselves in morally ambiguous situations. In the preceding sections, we laid out our basic theory; the corresponding model is shown in Figure 4. Below we expand on the basic model shown in Figure 4 by indicating alternate pathways that individuals may take (see Figure 5).

**SHIFTS IN MORAL JUDGMENT**

When well-intentioned individuals enter organizations, they already possess moral rules and beliefs. These rules and beliefs entail certain moral judgments from which their behavior will follow. We expect individuals’ moral judgments and behavior will remain constant unless a misalignment is detected (see Path A in Figure 5). Even in the face of an external sanction, a misalignment may go unchecked for individuals who do not identify with the source of the sanction and correspondingly fail to experience embarrassment (i.e., an internal sanction) in response to the external sanction (see Path B in Figure 5). Without embarrassment (i.e., an internal sanction) to trigger reflection, individuals’ moral judgments may remain static. It is possible that individuals in this scenario will make an attempt to appease their critics by temporarily adjusting their behavior (see Path C in Figure 5), but without a recalibration of moral judgments, they are likely to return to their problematic behavior. In contrast to these alternate pathways is our basic model (see Figure 4). When individuals are sanctioned by those with
whom they identify, embarrassment is likely to occur. This embarrassment (an internal sanction) should trigger reflection which can result in a shift in moral judgments especially when shifts entail changes in beliefs rather than rules. Recalibrated moral judgments are key to long term changes in behavior.

Insert Figure 5 about here.

Figure 4 represents propositions that should be tested empirically. Beyond these basic propositions, however, are many more avenues for future research. We suggest that it would be particularly fruitful to study sanction characteristics and their effects on embarrassment and moral judgments. Earlier in the paper we reviewed research demonstrating the effectiveness of sanction severity on behavior; however, we do not know from past research how sanction severity might influence embarrassment. It may be the case that stronger sanctions do not lead to more embarrassment. A personally damaging newspaper headline in a foreign country may not elicit the same degree of embarrassment as a disapproving frown from a neighbor; a more severe formal sanction may not elicit as much embarrassment as a less severe informal sanction. Moreover, certain sanction language or delivery may trigger varying levels of embarrassment due to individual or cultural differences. Future research should examine this connection between sanction severity and embarrassment. Sanctions can also vary in terms of the degree to which they clearly convey the harm done by individuals. Some sanctions may contain a clear message (e.g., “You opened someone else’s mail; that’s illegal!”); others may not (e.g., a dirty look). A sanction that indicates the nature of the transgression likely facilitates the process of moral judgment recalibration. Yet, the clarity of a message must be filtered through the
perception of the recipient. For various reasons, an objectively clear message may fail to inform its recipient. Future research should examine how sanctions can best be devised in order to clearly convey to transgressors the wrong they have done.

To the extent that sanction characteristics affect embarrassment and moral judgments, future research should also examine the antecedents of sanction characteristics (i.e., the factors leading observers of wrongdoing to choose one sanction over another). For instance, the type of moral judgment misalignment (i.e., problematic moral rule versus problematic belief) might play a role in determining the severity of a sanction. Sanctions associated with wrong beliefs might be weaker than sanctions associated with immoral rules. For example, in law, a person receives a lesser charge for shooting a man he mistakenly thought was a burglar, which suggests a problematic belief, than he would had he shot the man because he thinks murder is morally permissible, which suggests a problematic moral rule. Another consideration is the motivation of those assigning sanctions. For example, managers who want to make an example of a particular wrongdoer may levy more severe sanctions than those who are not particularly concerned with ethical transgressions in the workplace. Understanding these antecedents of sanction characteristics is important for developing a better understanding of moral judgment recalibration in organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

The key components of our theory are these: moral ambiguity, embarrassment triggered by sanctions, and a reformation of a moral judgment. We are concerned with well-intentioned employees in ethically ambiguous work situations who are disrupted by a sanction—originating with a coworker, a manager, an organization, or society—indicating the occurrence of a transgression. For those who identify with the source of the sanction, embarrassment is felt,
prompting the employees to recalibrate their moral judgments with the hope of reestablishing congruence with the group identity. Ours is not a story of calculated behaviors disrupted by the addition of new sanctions, which are then rationally weighed in a social vacuum and motivate specific behavior. Rather it is descriptive of what we experience—particularly the feelings—when we desire to “do the right thing” but unintentionally fall short of doing so and in the process jeopardize our standing with others. Most importantly, it is a story of how our moral judgments come to be formed and reformed in the context of organizations (especially via changes in beliefs).

Several of the issues raised in the course of developing our theory are significant. We dissected the concept of moral judgment so as to better understand what exactly it is and how it might be affected. Toward the latter purpose we also integrated aspects of the rationalist and social intuitionist perspectives. Moreover, we incorporated transgressors’ experiences by studying the discrete emotion of embarrassment. We did so in order to better understand the reality of practical reasoning in a particular situation (that of moral ambiguity).

Numerous implications can be drawn from our theory; we think that two in particular are important to note. First, in order for ethics education or training to be effective, the distinction between a moral rule and a belief must be recognized. In the wake of business scandals, the question of whether ethics can be taught often arises, particularly the question of whether business schools can instill in their students a sense of right and wrong. The distinction we make between a moral rule and a belief has implications for preventing wrongdoing: Ethics training programs that focus on moral rules alone will be less effective than those that are grounded in moral rules and also emphasize beliefs about the application of these rules. Few of us are trained philosophers, thus making the exercise of applying our moral rules not an entirely simple
endeavor. While we may all agree that bribery is wrong, dissecting particular situations so as to determine whether one has been bribed or has given a bribe may prove less straightforward. As Donaldson (1996, p. 55) asserted, “The pronouncement that bribery is unacceptable is useless unless accompanied by guidelines for gift giving, payments to get goods through customs, and ‘requests’ from intermediaries who are hired to ask for bribes.” Educational programs that specify appropriate beliefs may be especially helpful to the well-intentioned organizational member who wants to do the right thing, but needs guidance to determine how to apply moral rules (Warren, 2005). To the extent that the moral judgments of well-intentioned organizational members are initially calibrated with those found in organizations, the external sanctions that trigger the processes described in our theory are less likely to be occasioned.

Second, it is also important to note that the individuals’ recalibrated moral judgments may not always be more moral according to the larger society. In other words, misalignment between individuals’ moral judgments and those of their workplaces does not necessarily occur due to the individuals’ moral deficiency. Instead, the misalignment may be due to corruption at the level of the organization or perhaps the more local environment (Warren, 2003, 2006a, 2006b), whereby local values and norms contradict those found in the broader society. Individuals who find themselves in such corrupt environments may be chastised for behaviors deemed ethical outside of the workplace. For instance, Jeffrey Wigand, the highest-ranking executive to blow the whistle on a tobacco company, was ostracized for releasing evidence of the addictiveness of tobacco products (Enrich, 2001). Even with society on their side, people who are sanctioned for their alleged “wrongdoing” may experience embarrassment as an automatic response to being devalued by those in their immediate environment. The embarrassment will signal to them that they may have done something wrong and are morally deficient. This process
may lead to updated moral judgments that are more closely aligned with individuals’ corrupt surroundings and increasingly misaligned with society.

It is with this last point in mind that we suggest that the theory presented herein provides reason for optimism regarding ethics in organizations, but also for pessimism. Evil may be banal (Arendt, 1963/1992), but so is embarrassment. It is the run-of-the-mill, everyday antidote to moral ambiguity; it is the slap in the face that awakens us to what we are doing. With a faulty premise supplied by a corrupt social influence, however, it can dupe the well-intentioned employee into confusing right and wrong.
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FIGURE 1. Treviño’s (1986) Interactionist Model of Ethical Decision Making in Organizations

Cognitions
STAGE OF
COGNITIVE MORAL
DEVELOPMENT

Individual Moderators
EGO STRENGTH
FIELD DEPENDENCE
LOCUS OF CONTROL

Situational Moderators
IMMEDIATE JOB CONTEXT
Reinforcement
Other pressures

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE
Normative structure
Referent others
Obedience to authority
Responsibility for consequences

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORK
Role taking
Resolution of moral conflict

Ethical dilemma

Ethical/unethical behavior

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Figure 3. Haidt’s (2001) Social Intuitionist Model

Note. The numbered links, drawn for Person A only, are (1) the intuitive judgment link, (2) the post hoc reasoning link, (3) the reasoned persuasion link, and (4) the social persuasion link. Two additional links are hypothesized to occur less frequently: (5) the reasoned judgment link and (6) the private reflection link. Copyright © 2001 by the American Psychological Association. Figure and note reproduced with permission. The official citation that should be used in referencing this material is this: Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review, 108*, 814-834. The use of APA information does not imply endorsement by APA.
Figure 4. Sanctions, Embarrassment, & Shifts in Moral Judgment

Identification with the Source of Sanction

Initial Moral Judgment → Deviance → External Sanction → Internal Sanction (Embarrassment) → Recalibrated Moral Judgment → Compliance
Figure 5. Expanded Model of Sanctions, Embarrassment, & Shifts in Moral Judgment