EDUCATING FOR ETHICAL SURVIVAL
RESEARCH IN ETHICAL ISSUES IN ORGANIZATIONS

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

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

The second contribution in this issue is by Timothy F. O’Shannassy. In his paper ‘Using Ethics of Governance to Sooth Tensions on Strategic Intent: Artfully Managing an Age Old Source of War in Organisations’, O’Shannassy,
in a similar vein to Randolph-Seng, Novicevic, Ingram and Roberts, explores discord in the organisation and the ability to avoid it and survive ethically. The paper explores ethics of governance deficiencies which include weak management of the principal-agent problem by the board of directors, and conflict over the strategic intent of the organisation. Organisations must avoid this source of tension which is caused by the emergence of managerial hegemony over the organisation. Instead, O’Shannassy argues that organisations must promote sound executive stewardship and effective social exchange. Consequently, this paper highlights the importance of strategic intent as a unifying rhetorical message and as a key component of an ethics of governance.

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

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

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

In the last paper in this section ‘The Role of Reflection in Learning at Higher Education’, Theodora Issa, Tomayess Issa, Rohini Balapumi, Lydia Maketo and Umera Imtinan answer the question ‘Why reflection is important to introduce in teaching and learning’. They do so utilising data collected from a sample population of 257 undergraduate students in business ethics undergraduate classes in Australia. This paper commences with a brief literature review on reflection,
followed by the provision of tentative results of a study on the role of reflection in learning. The paper discusses the students’ reflections on their personal learning as a global citizen. Furthermore, how that perspective informed their views on both the ethical decision-making process and global citizenship.

**SPECIAL SECTION: TEACHING APPLIED ETHICS**

*Introduction*

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

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

*A Brief Word on Peer Review*

*Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations (REIO)* is an academic journal publishing original research that has been subjected to the standard peer review process. In the interests of scholarly clarity, it is appropriate to explicitly highlight that this special section of Issue 24 departs from *REIO*’s normal mode of academic publication. This section’s purpose is more akin to that of a textbook (or even a ‘how to’ manual). The aim is to draw out techniques, insights and lessons learned from experienced practitioners, and to present them in an accessible manner to those who may have little background in moral philosophy, or even in humanities and the social sciences more generally. For this purpose, peer scholarly review
on (inter alia) the basis of research originality and command of literature would have been not only redundant but counterproductive. As such, the following section is based upon peer collaboration, and has been subject only to editorial review – not blind peer review. We are grateful to *REIO*’s editors for allowing the contribution to proceed in this exceptional way to deliver a product we hope will be of great use to many teachers of applied ethics.

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

We also thank all the contributors to this issue. Some are Australians. Others live abroad. Without this global contribution, we would not have an issue. But there are others both in Australia and abroad whose anonymous contributions made this issue possible, and these are our blind reviewers. Without the latter, the former would not have an issue to contribute to. As always, they have our heartfelt thanks.
PROPENSITY TO MORALLY DISENGAGE: THE MALEVOLENT LEADER DYAD OF ANDREW CARNEGIE AND HENRY FRICK

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

ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

With the current scholarly interest in moral disengagement processes (Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015) and plural forms of leadership (Gronn, 2015), we reasoned that an analysis of the compelling leader dyad of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick is conceptually generative. Towards this aim, we first review the extant literature regarding moral disengagement mechanisms and construct an argument for collective leadership as a prospective situational antecedent within the disengagement process. Next, we describe our historical case approach to theory elaboration and situate our dyadic leadership actors, Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick. Finally, we use insights developed from our analysis to illustrate a conceptualisation that reflects a dispositional and situational interaction
as a precursor to a propensity to morally disengage, as well as the significant cognitive, behavioural, and rhetorical processes used to justify unethical behaviour. Our analysis helps to fill gaps in theory by illustrating how leader egoism can pervade moral identity and foster symbolic moral self-regard and moral licensing to increase a propensity to morally disengage. Furthermore, we provide evidence to support a significant moral disengagement trigger/tool that has been ignored in the literature: collective leadership.

MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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