Developing Dynamic Moral Capacities in Business Ethics Education: Extending the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) Framework

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Abstract. Business ethics education aims to enable students to become conscious of their own values and develop the capacity to voice such values and make value-consistent decisions. However, a student's personal values and the capacity to act on them tend to change after graduation. In this study, we discuss how moral learning is different in real work life compared to a business school setting, and we explain why graduates may downplay or abandon their values after graduation. We launch the concept of *dynamic moral capacity* (DMC), defined as the metacognitive routines for processing moral decision outcomes, motivated by humility goals. We suggest that future courses in business ethics develop DMC to avoid *value drift* and negative moral learning over time after graduation. Finally, we discuss how DMC can be included in the instructional framework of *giving voice to values* and thus increase its impact on moral learning after graduation.

Keywords: moral learning, giving voice to values, business ethics education, dynamic moral capacity, humility, meta-cognition.

1. Introduction

Modern business ethics courses may have profound effects on students' ethical decision making (Watts *et al.* 2017). Innovative and comprehensive instructional frameworks, such as *giving voice to values* (GVV; Arch & Gentile 2015; Gentile 2011), have been widely adopted and have likely helped improve the effectiveness of business ethics education (BEE; see Gentile 2017). For instance, one study found that participating in a GVV programme leads to increased self-reported confidence in addressing ethical dilemmas and a greater willingness to speak up about ethical concerns (Fink & Gentile 2016). Another study conducted in a business school setting found that GVV participants report feeling more

prepared and empowered to take ethical action (Gentile 2012). However, there is room for improvement. We focus on a specific topic that is important but has received little attention so far: *What kind of instructional approaches would actively stimulate moral learning over time after graduation*?

We first discuss the concept of moral learning and then explain how moral learning in real business contexts differs from learning in the classroom. We draw on a framework developed by Hannah *et al.* (2011), which suggests that moral maturation and moral conation consist of six basic moral capacities. Moral learning is defined as changes in moral capacities over time. We argue that students need to develop a seventh capacity for moral learning post-graduation, termed *dynamic moral capacity* (DMC), because moral learning is different in real work life from that in a classroom setting. We then compare our approach to traditional BEE and the GVV framework (Gentile 2017). In the following section, we define and explore the nature of DMC and show why this capacity is needed to stimulate positive moral learning after graduation. Finally, we discuss how DMC can be added to the GVV framework. We suggest that an extended version of GVV, which includes DMC, will be more effective in preventing *value drift* over time and will support students better in making value-consistent decisions after graduation.

2. Moral Learning and Moral Capacities

Our perspective on moral learning is based on the notion of moral capacities (Hannah *et al.* 2011; Jagger & Volkman 2012). We define moral learning as *changes in moral capacities*: moral complexity, moral identity, moral meta-cognitive ability, moral courage, moral ownership and moral efficacy (explained below). Such moral capacities change over time based on the processing of real business life experiences, and this learning goes on throughout the 40–50 years of an individuals' business career. For instance, the goals and values of graduates will change over time, both in terms of priority and how central they are to the self-concept of the person (change in moral identity). There is certainly a risk of value drift in the sense that the moral values once held in high regard become deflated and less central over time, whereas other values that are more salient and financially rewarding in the business world take on leading roles. Such changes are often the results of thousands of small moral learning incidents in which the processing of decision outcomes leads to incremental changes in moral capacities. Thus, BEE should not only focus on what students learn within the limited timeframe of the business programme but also on how they go on learning through their business careers after graduation.

Hannah *et al.* (2011) developed a framework of six moral capacities, three cognitive maturation capacities and three conative capacities (action oriented). In

the following, we describe the six capacities and then address the nature of learning (change) processes in the classroom and business settings, respectively.

Figure 1: Framework for moral maturation and moral conation (Hannah *et al.* 2011, p. 666)
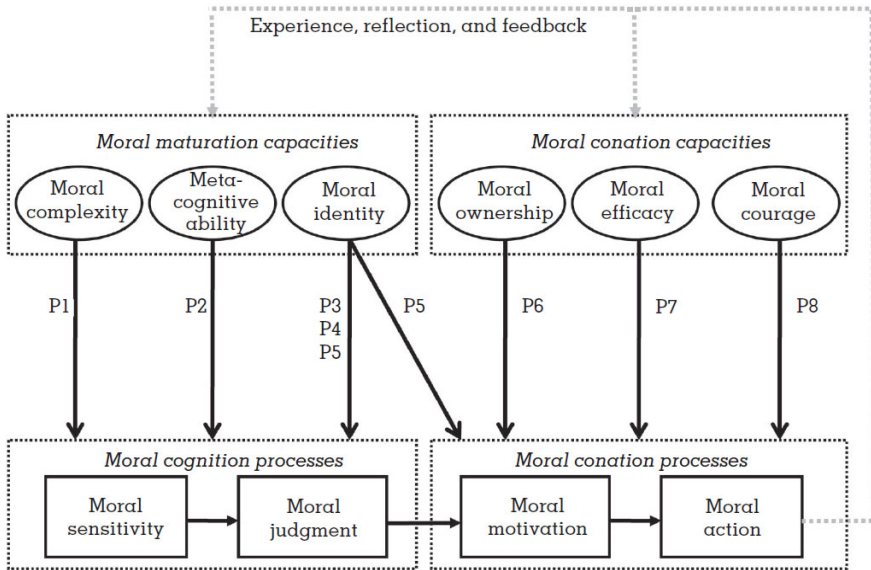
Moral Cognitive Maturation Capacities

Hannah *et al.*'s (2011) framework includes three moral maturation capacities: *moral complexity*, *moral identity* and *meta-cognitive ability*. *Moral complexity* is about the richness and complexity of the mental representations that individuals draw on when processing moral problems and making moral decisions (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg 2002). Individuals may have more or less complex representations of knowledge domains, depending on their level of development. Moral complexity is an important moral capacity because the mental models that individuals use to organise and make meaning of the world strongly influence how they make decisions. A greater moral complexity provides a larger and more developed basis of information for processing moral problems (e.g. Sonenshein 2007). Thus, cognitively complex individuals can more easily identify *moral cues*, make sense of moral problems and dilemmas, and integrate moral information when making decisions (Hannah *et al.* 2011). The development of moral complexity is a typical objective of traditional courses in business ethics (Trezise & Biesta 2009).

Moral identity refers to the mental representation that individuals hold about their moral character; it is the extent to which they conceive of themself as a moral person. Moral self-knowledge includes personal goals and values, such as being friendly, honest, caring, hardworking and forgiving. Aquino and Reed (2002)

identified two dimensions of moral identity: internalisation and symbolisation. Internalisation refers to the extent to which moral traits are central to the self-concept. Symbolisation reflects the degree to which these traits are present in actual behaviour. The motivational force of moral identity relates to the consistency principle in which individuals strive to behave consistently with their identities (Erikson 1964). Thus, a strong moral identity stimulates moral intentions and behaviours that are consistent with one's moral self-concept. In support of this theory, Aquino and Reed (Aquino & Reed 2002; Reed & Aquino 2003) found that moral identity predicts several moral behaviours, such as volunteering and a willingness to minimise harm. Importantly, Reynolds and Ceranic (2007) demonstrated that moral judgement and moral identity independently influence moral behaviour.

The third cognitive capacity is *meta-cognitive ability*, which refers to the monitoring and regulation of cognitive processes (Dunlosky & Metcalfe 2008). From the perspective of dual-processing theory (Sloman 2014), we view metacognitive skills as the ability to evaluate and manage impulsive responses by using slower thinking inspired by one's moral identity (see Malle 2021). When individuals face moral problems, certain emotions and cognitions are triggered spontaneously. Metacognitive skills manage these responses and determine which cognitive elements to attend to and prioritise in decision-making processes (Reynolds 2008; Sonenshein 2007).

In Hannah *et al.*'s (2011) framework, the three cognitive capacities mainly influence moral sensitivity and judgement. However, moral identity also affects moral motivation.

Moral Conative Capacities

Moral conative capacities influence moral motivation and behaviour. In addition to moral identity, which is both a cognitive and a conative capacity, the following three types of capacities are termed conative: *moral courage*, *moral ownership* and *moral efficacy* (Hannah *et al.* 2011). First, self-efficacy is about mastery expectations and refers to the strength of the beliefs that people have in their own abilities to complete tasks and reach goals (Bandura 2001). *Moral self-efficacy* is the strength of the beliefs that people have in their own abilities to make moral decisions. People with high moral self-efficacy are more likely to engage in difficult ethical dilemmas (rather than choosing the easy way out) and more likely to persist in the search for future prosocial or moral action (Krettenauer 2020). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is both an assessment of one's skills and of what is possible to achieve with such skills. Self-efficacy is a human function and is therefore a product of the dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural and environmental influences (Klassen & Usher 2010). These environmental sources include factors such as rules, systems and the advice and support of others (moral social capital).

Moral ownership is defined as 'the extent to which members feel a sense of psychological responsibility over the ethical nature of their own actions, those of