

MORALITY IN A BUSINESS CONTEXT



Research Questions

- How do business practitioners construct their professional moral identities? How do they position themselves in relation to others?
- What are the dominant discourses around morality available to them? What impact do these have?
- How do contextual and other factors impact?
- How do they define boundaries and construct categories?

Contribution & Next Steps

Understanding how business practitioners develop their moral identities may elicit insights that could influence businesses focusing on the professional development of their employees, regulators and professional bodies seeking to advise practitioners and organisations, and business educators developing programmes fit for managers in the 21st century.

Next steps: Finalise research proposal & gain ethical approval in Summer 2015. Aim to start fieldwork in Autumn 2015.

Research Context

Many well-documented business scandals have been blamed upon the unethical behaviour of business practitioners.

As well as censuring managers, organisations and regulators, commentators have highlighted the role of business educators in failing to develop a sufficiently strong sense of morality in their students (Cavanagh, 2009)

Media interest in ethical issues related to business remains high and has broadened to include issues of sustainability as well as those related to corruption & fraud (Barkemeyer et al, 2010).

Research Methods

This research adopts a **Social Constructionist perspective**, which stresses that meaning is made through human interaction.

To analyse social phenomena, a **Qualitative methodology**, using a **narrative or discursive research method**, is appropriate. For example, semi-structured interviews.

Respondents will be business practitioners, from a range of industries. The aim will be to elicit narratives related to morality in a work situation.

Data Analysis focus will be on emotions, values or personal traits.



Literature

The research will be informed by several strands of literature:

Identity Theory: Stets & Carter (2011) on multiple identities, Blasi (1980) on the role of emotions and the Self model, Stryker (1980, 2002) on fidelity to the moral self, Sherblom (2012) on implicit and explicit identities, Tajfel (1974) on Social Identity theory and the role of context.

Positioning Theory: Harré et al (1999) on the ways that individuals position themselves in relation to others.

Values: Hitlin (2003) on personal identity and values.

Moral Identity literature: Blasi (1999) on the moral self, Aquino & Reed (2002) on the Social-Cognitive perspective, McFerran et al (2010) on Ethical Ideology.

Is there a Gap?

Moral identity is an emergent area of empirical research (Shao et al, 2008).

Moral identity of a range of groups has been explored, in populations as diverse as, indigenous people (Yang, 2008) and new academics (Fitzmaurice, 2013).

Empirical studies have established links between moral identity and moral behaviour (Aquino & Reed, 2003) and ethical decision-making (Gu & Neesham, 2014). No study has yet explored the way that business practitioners construct their moral identity.

Frameworks

Emotions: Haidt (2001, 2003, 2004) identifies four families of moral emotions: Other-condemning (contempt, anger, disgust), Self-conscious (shame, embarrassment, guilt), Other-suffering (compassion), Other-praising (gratitude, elevation).

Values: Schwartz (1992) identifies 10 value types along 2 dimensions in his model of Universal Human Values which may be relevant to moral identity.

Personal Traits: Aquino & Reed (2002) measure moral identity using a range of character traits such as caring & compassion.