

# In Search of Virtue: The Role of Virtues, Values and Character Strengths in Ethical Decision Making

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**Abstract** We present a comprehensive model that integrates virtues, values, character strengths and ethical decision making (EDM). We describe how a largely consequentialist ethical framework has dominated most EDM scholarship to date. We suggest that reintroducing a virtue ethical perspective to existing EDM theories can help to illustrate deficiencies in existing decision-making models, and suggest that character strengths and motivational values can serve as natural bridges that link a virtue framework to EDM in organizations. In conjunction with the more fully formulated extant research on situational determinants, we present and discuss our model that introduces a virtue based orientation to EDM.

**Keywords** Character strengths · Ethical decision making · Virtues · Values

## Introduction

We seek to present a comprehensive model that integrates values, virtues, character strengths and ethical decision making (EDM). Our intent is to leverage the large body of research in each domain to present a decision-making model that in its totality delivers critical insights for both research and practice. The importance of developing such a model has been widely recognized (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008), yet the obstacles to its development are significant since each domain has a long history of debate and fragmented theory development (Treviño et al. 2006; Wright and Goodstein 2007). We do not intend to resolve these debates, but rather build on core frameworks in each domain to extract elements that enable us to develop an integrative model. Although we reference widely, we draw specifically on Rest's (1986) model of EDM, Schwartz's (1996) model of values and Peterson and Seligman's (2004) work on virtues and character strengths.

Our motivation in developing this model has been to understand the role of character in decision making. In a research project that sought to uncover lessons for leadership from the 2008–2009 financial crisis, the term character surfaced time and again amongst the participants—mainly individuals from the C-suite—in a series of leadership forums across three continents (Gandz et al. 2010). For example, the participants described how arrogance and ego impeded decision making, and in contrast, how courage and prudence served others well in being able to withstand pressure to pursue investments that were based on dubious collateral or over-engineered financial instruments. Furthermore, they commented that leaders exhibiting character strengths such as humility and patience; listened to what their managers and employees at lower-level positions were telling them; and these leaders appreciated divergent perspectives.

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The message we received was clear. There was strong sentiment that character was critical in leadership and decision making even though most had difficulties articulating what it was. More importantly, the participants expected business schools to take a leadership role in helping them understand what character is, to identify what impact it has on decision making, and how it can be developed. As we sought to understand the role of character in decision making we concluded that focusing on EDM would help to narrow the analysis and would serve to illuminate its role. Values and virtues evolved as important underpinnings to character and so the proposed model seeks to integrate these elements.

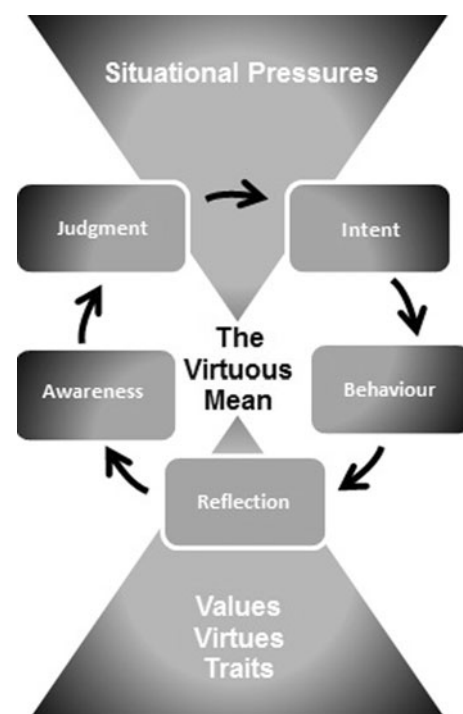
It is not our intent to present a set of propositions as is often customary in theory development, but rather to propose a model with clear underlying premises and assumptions from which a multitude of propositions could then be developed. We see this as a critical step in “establishing how the virtues work (literally) in practice” (Beadle and Moore 2006, p. 337). In doing so our paper makes several unique contributions. First, it provides bridge-building between the philosophical and psychological literatures and hence our model integrates key concepts that have largely remained disconnected, thereby helping to inform both theory and practice. Second, it fills an important niche in the EDM literature by highlighting the normative side through our focus on virtue ethics. Third, it helps to bridge the microperspective at the individual level with the macroperspective where situational pressures in the decision-making context often exist. Finally, our model is particularly relevant in complex and ambiguous situations, where ethical codes outlining universal principles and rules are ill-suited to provide guidance to the decision maker (Nyberg 2007).

The paper is structured around the model depicted in Fig. 1 as follows. First, using Rest’s (1986) four-component model of EDM, we describe how a largely consequentialist ethical framework has dominated most EDM scholarship to date. We then suggest that reintroducing a virtue ethical perspective to existing EDM theories can help to illustrate deficiencies in existing models, and suggest that character strengths and motivational values can serve as natural bridges that link a virtue framework to EDM in organizations. In conjunction with the more fully formulated research on situational determinants of EDM, we then present and discuss a model that introduces a virtue-based orientation (VBO) to an expanded view of EDM that is rooted in a learning framework. We conclude with a discussion about the model, individual and environmental barriers to EDM and limitations. Avenues for future research are also considered.

## Ethical Decision Making and Ethical Frameworks

In the introduction we noted that our model applies to decision making in general, but we focus on EDM to provide a sharper distinction to the theoretical concepts of interest. The difference between decisions in general and ethical decisions is not as straightforward as most individuals would think. Given that an ethical decision is defined as any decision that may benefit or harm others or that exercises the rights of some while denying the rights of others (Hosmer 2008) it is clear that many decisions may not at first be perceived as ethical when taken, but have clear ethical implications when closely examined. We chose to focus on EDM to surface underlying decision-making elements, such as awareness and judgment, which serve to illuminate why many decisions are not perceived to be ethical in nature when in fact they are. As such, although behaviour is the result of both conscious and subconscious processes, we begin with a focus specifically on the conscious processes of EDM.

One of the most commonly invoked explanations of EDM is Rest’s (1986) four-component psychological process of EDM that begins with moral awareness and moral judgement and concludes with moral intent and finally moral behaviour (Jones 1991; Jones and Ryan 1997; Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Loe et al. 2000; O’Fallon and



**Fig. 1** A value-based model (VBO) of ethical decision making EDM

Butterfield 2005; Treviño et al. 2006).<sup>1</sup> Rest's model is based on Kohlberg's EDM research, which in turn, was built on the work of Piaget (Biggs et al. 1997; Stephens and Smith 2009). While Rest (1986) prefixes the four components of the EDM framework as moral, the elements (awareness, judgement, intent and behaviour) are actually purely descriptive and stripped of normative content. Hence we deliberately omit this qualifier—moral—from our model. As well, the term moral moves beyond values and virtues to incorporate societal norms about what ought or should be done, or what is valuable. We tease out societal norms as part of the situational forces that influence awareness, judgement, intent and behaviour.

A useful heuristic for the categorization of normative ethics is into its three major ethical frameworks: consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics (Hursthouse 2007). The basic tenets of a consequentialist account of normative ethics is that what is right or wrong, good or bad, should be derived from a careful analysis of the perceived costs and benefits of a given course of action. Deontological frameworks, on the other hand, suggest that ethical behaviour should align with a set of universal principles of duty, rights and justice rather than seeking net social benefits, which may still allow for the marginalization of some groups or individuals. In comparison, rather than focusing on outcomes, the virtue ethics framework emphasizes the excellences of personal character to define moral behaviour (Ferrell et al. 2009).

This broad tripartite typology has been used in previous research to distinguish between ethical frameworks (Whetstone 2001) and is not meant to imply that other ethical frameworks do not exist. Rather, philosophers have debated the merits and challenges of these and other perspectives for millennia and a resolution to the moral superiority of one framework over the other is therefore improbable. Ultimately, however, it can be said that, at a minimum, each perspective serves to inform the other two and that no one approach can be considered to be a complete account of ethical behaviour on its own (Hosmer 2008).

<sup>1</sup> While the terms ethical and moral are often used interchangeably (e.g., Jones 1991), we understand ethics to be a system of beliefs that allows individuals to make decisions about difficult issues in order to determine what is right and wrong, while morality, more broadly construed, may encompass and support a particular ethical system, but may also include personal, cultural and societal norms and standards by which people judge the rightness or wrongness of behaviour (Hosmer 2008, p. 99). For example, at one point in time, slavery was considered morally acceptable behaviour. However, analyzing slavery through ethical frameworks such as consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics, allows for a more methodological assessment of the rightness/wrongness of this behaviour. As well, something could be immoral individually yet moral organizationally as would be the case with alcohol where it may be immoral for some individuals to consume alcohol given religious beliefs, but still moral for organizations to serve alcohol at company events given company norms.

Descriptive ethicists—including sociologists, psychologists and business scholars who look at individual and group behaviour in organizations—largely avoid applying any manner of normative content (what individuals *should* do) even when discussing intrinsically normative questions such as the processes of EDM (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008). This is not entirely surprising, given that business or management, as a discipline, has been accused of sidelining the discussion of ethics and morality in its quest for legitimacy within the sciences (Ghoshal 2005). The scientific approach favoured in business research emphasizes the discovery of laws and patterns in the universe, and has thus tended to exclude the role of human intentionality or choice, freeing individuals from any sense of moral responsibility in the process (Ghoshal 2005).

The content of descriptive ethics, particularly in business and management scholarship, has been almost entirely consequentialist, with a focus on promoting a cost–benefit analysis and the often instrumental outcomes of ethical decisions such as sustained competitive advantage (Paine 2003) and superior financial performance (Vogel 2005). It has even been observed that the pervasive focus on shareholder value maximization (a consequentialist framing) has become in and of itself rule-like and duty-driven and hence entered the realm of deontological inquiry. Renewed debates about the role of business in society that have accompanied recent ethical and financial crises have also contributed to the increase of deontological content in EDM process models.

However, there has been almost no discussion of virtue ethical frameworks in the analysis of decision making in organizations (Caza et al. 2004; Nyberg 2007; Solomon 1992). There has been some foundational work focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of the link between virtues and organizations. For example, Weaver (2006) connected individual virtue and identity pointing out that organizations set a context for compartmentalizing identities, giving rise to situations in which individuals lose sight of who they are. In the end, however, the absence of a virtue ethical perspective in current models of EDM presents a unique opportunity to integrate specific individual-level determinants of ethical behaviour in organizations (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008).

To illustrate, there is a clear absence of a virtue ethical perspective in Rest's (1986) model of EDM. In fact, Rest goes so far as to emphasize that his four-component model

represents the processes involved in the production of a moral act, not general traits of people. The four components are not presented as four virtues that make up the ideally moral person, but rather they are the major units of analysis in tracing out how a particular course of action was produced in the context of a particular situation (p. 5).

Other models of EDM in organizations are also similarly devoid of virtue ethical considerations focused on the individual—how a charitable, benevolent, wise, courageous or temperate person may act when facing ethical dilemmas. For example, Treviño's (1986) person–situation interactionist model of EDM sidesteps the possibility of virtue ethical determinants of EDM. Individual-level factors are limited to personality traits such as ego strength and locus of control (Treviño 1986). Similarly, both Hunt and Vitell (1986) and Jones and Ryan (1997) allow for consequentialist and deontological considerations in the EDM process, but they do not consider a virtue ethical foundation. In fact, many scholars have added individual-level variables to Rest's (1986) four-component model of EDM, including thinking style (Groves et al. 2008), moral intensity (Jones 1991) and authentic leadership development (May et al. 2003); but none have included virtue ethical evaluations. Indeed, several recent reviews of the determinants of EDM in organizations clearly demonstrate the lack of attention given to the possible role of virtues, character strengths or values in the EDM process (Loe et al. 2000; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005; Treviño et al. 2006).

As in all philosophical debates, however, a single framework provides an unbalanced or insufficient explanation of ethical behaviour (Hosmer 2008). In discussions of EDM processes then, research rooted in consequentialist and deontological frameworks have prioritized questions of “What should I do?” over equally important questions such as “Who should I be?” and “How does who I am affect my decisions and actions?” What is needed therefore, for all the three normative approaches, is an additional principle borrowed from one of the other frameworks—consequentialists need universal principles to balance their exclusive focus on cost–benefit equations, deontologists require some type of cost–benefit analysis to prioritize between principles, and both can be informed by examining how ethical decisions might be made by an individual that one would consider to be virtuous. This is a rather controversial approach since some scholars, notably MacIntyre (1991), argued that these three perspectives are “rival versions of moral enquiry.” However, in the end,

each ethical system expresses [only] a portion of the truth. Each system has adherents and opponents. And each, it is important to admit, is incomplete or inadequate as a means of judging the true moral content of managerial decisions and actions (Hosmer 2008, p. 112).

Although we are in general agreement with Hosmer, we qualify the statement by suggesting that individuals need not be seeking “truth” in the quest for judging “ethical content” but rather, they may seek to broaden their perspective in the quest for decisions and actions that are better informed.

The next section describes in more detail what is meant by a virtue ethical perspective specifically, and how this perspective can serve to inform existing models of EDM in organizations.

### A Return to Virtue Ethics

The virtue ethical framework begins with an examination of the intrinsic qualities that make someone admirable, excellent or virtuous. Virtues are “acquired human qualities, the excellences of character, which enable a person to achieve the good life” (Mintz 1996, p. 827). This branch of normative ethics is based in ancient Greek philosophy, in particular the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, who considered the goal of human existence to be the pursuit of excellence or of virtue. This constant striving for excellence of character was deemed a necessary activity by all humans so that they could live in a “good society” as defined in terms of happiness.

The virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, transcendence and humanity have been valued not only by moral philosophers and religious thinkers across a broad survey of historical texts and contexts, but they emerge as almost universally accepted components of what might broadly be considered good character (Peterson and Seligman 2004). Aristotle conceived of virtues as desirable mean states between vices of deficiency and vices of excess. For example, courage is a virtue between cowardliness (vice of deficiency) and recklessness (vice of excess) (*Nicomachean ethics* 1106a26–1106b28). Similarly, humility would be a virtue between the deficiency of shyness and the excess of shamelessness. Virtues are thus moral qualities attributable to the individual that can nonetheless be destroyed by actions that are in some way deficient or excessive. Core to this conceptualization is that individuals make a deliberate, rational choice to act in a manner that lies between these two extremes and is thus considered virtuous (Mintz 1996). In fact, Aristotle believed that good judgement held the greatest importance in ethics, and the ability to carefully consider how a virtuous person would act when facing an ethical dilemma, key to developing a virtuous character (Cameron 2011; Nyberg 2007; Solomon 1992).

Aristotle's view of the virtuous mean has been largely ignored in recent discussions. Cameron (2003) has suggested that there can be no excess of virtue. Instead, virtuousness is something that is positively deviant, with the mean—or normal behaviour—being ethical behaviour and the deficiency being unethical behaviour. We concur with this point when virtue is understood to be the virtuous mean. Wrapped up in this discussion of virtue and vice is whether it is human nature to be virtuous or not. Many

current management theories in general (Ghoshal 2005) and ethical models in particular (e.g., Donaldson and Dunfee 1994) make the implicit assumption that individuals only engage in “good” behaviour because of complex social contracts and engage in virtuous behaviour out of abnormality. However, the opposite assumption is also plausible—that human beings are actually predisposed to be virtuous (Sadler-Smith 2012) and are instead continuously fighting temptations to transgress and thus remain true to their virtuous selves. These two perspectives highlight the key role that context plays in exerting pressure for better or worse. Although we do not specifically examine the role of situational determinants on EDM (for a recent review see Alzola (2012) and O’Fallon and Butterfield (2005)) we acknowledge its role and will examine its implications in future sections.

While common sense suggests that virtue ethics is clearly tied to EDM, it is interesting to note the absence of a virtue ethical framework in existing EDM models. Rather, large quantities of empirical studies have focused on descriptive rather than normative individual-level determinants of ethical behaviour including demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education level), personality traits (e.g., locus of control, Machiavellianism) and other attributes (e.g., religion, dispositions) (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; O’Fallon and Butterfield 2005). Virtues, however, differ from demographic characteristics or other conceptualizations of personality traits, in that they intrinsically carry value. Personality traits, on the other hand, have largely been divorced from any moral value in their descriptive use in sociology, psychology or business. Nonetheless, there has been an increased call to include a virtue ethical framework into the analysis of various management topics including: executive leadership (Manz et al. 2008), EDM in organizations (Arjoon 2007), the role of business in society (Arjoon 2000), market economics (Graafland 2009) and even the pedagogical approach to teaching business ethics (Mintz 1996).

We propose that research into character strengths and motivational values can serve as two natural bridges between the descriptive ethics of psychological or management models of EDM and a virtue ethical account of EDM in organizations.

### The Role of Character Strengths

Character strengths are “the psychological ingredients—processes or mechanisms—that define the virtues ... they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues” (Peterson and Seligman 2004, p. 13). As such, character strengths present themselves as objective and observable analytical variables—actual behavioural dispositions—that can be assessed according to traditional

empirical methods (e.g., the use of behavioural observation scales to measure the character strengths of creativity, compassion or fairness). However, because they are rooted in the virtues, they offer a link to the normative content of what can universally be considered good character and thus help fuse the two domains.

In their compendium of character strengths and virtues, Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify six universal virtues that are common across a broad sample of cultures, religions and moral philosophers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The authors have identified numerous character strengths that exemplify each of these virtues and that have passed a battery of validity criteria.

What is less clear, however, is how these character strengths influence EDM in organizations. Simply being creative, kind or optimistic is unlikely to inform EDM processes in organizations. As such, character strengths alone are insufficient to explain EDM. Rather, what is needed is a theory of individual-level motivation to act in a manner that displays these character strengths. Aristotle contends that goodness of character can be developed through practice of the virtues, for as “virtue itself is a disposition which has been developed out of a capacity by the proper exercise of that capacity” (Copleston 1962, p. 336). In other words, the only way to become virtuous is by performing virtuous acts. For example, Mintz (1996) articulated that “we become just by the practice of just actions, courageous by performing acts of courage. [These] characteristics develop from corresponding activities” (Mintz 1996, p. 829). However, this is not meant to imply that a single act of courage renders an individual courageous. Rather, virtues are developed over time and formed through habitual practice of the virtues and regular repetition of the right actions (Graafland 2009; Sadler-Smith 2012).

### The Role of Values

What then motivates individuals to perform virtuous acts must be some underlying belief in the intrinsic value of repeatedly behaving in a way that reflects the pursuit of excellence of character. Here we present our second proposed bridge between descriptive and normative ethics—the vast empirical work on motivational values that has shown that values are determinants of individual behaviour and choice (Agle and Caldwell 1999; Fritzsche and Oz 2007; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004; Schwartz 1996).

Values are desirable, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives (Schwartz 1996) by exerting internal pressure to behave in a certain way (Illies and Reiter-Palmon 2008). Thus values are “what people want or consider beneficial to their welfare, although the



ultimate evidence for what a person values lies in their actions” (Rokeach 1973). Values motivate action and as such, values can be prioritized in some hierarchical manner and preference given to certain values over others; if not, individuals would become paralyzed by conflict and unable to act (Locke 1991).

Schwartz (1996) and his colleagues have established that there are ten distinct and universally applicable motivational values that can be distinguished along two competing dimensions: openness to change (stimulation, self-direction) versus conservation (tradition, conformity, security) and self-enhancement (power, achievement, hedonism) versus self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence). These ten values and their uniqueness are supported by cross-cultural research (Smith et al. 2008). Each of these 10 motivational values contains two or more different single values which represent a motivational value (e.g., single values such as forgiving and loyal are reflective of benevolence). Interestingly, research on values and EDM has focused almost entirely on just two of these dimensions—self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values. Not surprisingly, self-transcendence values have been linked to ethical and socially responsible behaviour while self-enhancement values appear to be negatively related to ethical behaviour (Crilly et al. 2008; Egri and Herman 2000). It seems evident that individuals who are motivated by self-transcendence values such as universalism or benevolence will select different courses of action than individuals who are motivated by power, achievement or hedonism (self-enhancement motives).

The universal motivational values established by Schwartz and colleagues and validated by others (Bardi and Schwartz 2003) have been found to have a circular structure in that the competing dimensions form polar opposites to each other. This means that pursuing opposing values simultaneously is unlikely given competing motivational cores (Locke 1991)—for example, seeking success for oneself (pursuit of achievement values) is likely to circumvent actions aimed at enhancing the welfare of others (pursuit of benevolence values) which lie on opposite poles of the structure (Schwartz 1996, p. 4). This does not mean, however, that these opposing values have limited relationships with character strengths and virtues. In examining the relationships between values (as proposed by Schwartz) and virtues (as proposed by Peterson and Seligman), one can see how virtues might fundamentally underpin different character strengths, which can ultimately be seen as different expressions of what one values. For example, the virtue of wisdom can be displayed through the character strengths of curiosity, creativity and independent thought, which are also characteristics associated with individuals who are motivated by openness to change. However, wisdom can also be displayed through ambition and the pursuit of intellect (self-enhancement values) or through deep

understanding, tolerance and appreciation (self-transcendence values). The same could be said for courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence in that these virtues may also manifest differently for individuals driven by different motivational values. Relegating the discussion of virtues as the sole purview of individuals who are primarily motivated by self-transcendence values is thus an incomplete account of how virtues and character strengths can serve as underlying mechanisms in models of EDM.

Returning to Rest’s (1986) model of EDM, it is quite possible that individuals with the character strengths associated with the same virtue but with different motivational values would have different awareness, judgement, intent and behaviour as a result of the application of those values to ethical decisions. For example, research has shown that the character strength of compassion is associated with greater levels of awareness in others’ suffering (Dutton et al. 2006) which could impact the EDM process. However, this impact may differ depending on one’s motivational values—an individual motivated by conservation versus openness to change values, for example, may choose to display their compassion through philanthropic donation rather than a more stimulating or self-directed behaviour such as volunteering in the field. Similarly, individuals with the same values but with different character strengths will yield different outcomes with respect to EDM. Motivated by self-transcendence values, individuals may display compassion or generosity, both of which are character strengths associated with the virtue of humanity. Hence virtues and character strengths alone are insufficient in explaining EDM as are values alone and it is only by integrating the three that we gain a more complete understanding of EDM.

In summary, we argue that virtue ethics should be considered alongside traditional consequentialist and deontological models of EDM in social scientific accounts of EDM in organizations. As well, by examining virtues, character strengths and values together, we have greater insight into EDM. In the following section, we illustrate the importance of this virtue ethical perspective in EDM by returning to Aristotle’s doctrine of the virtuous mean. In so doing, we highlight several premises that contribute to our overall model and therefore understanding of EDM.

### **Virtues, Values, Character and EDM: The VBO Model**

Having bridged virtues to EDM through character strengths and values, we now present the key processes in our VBO model of EDM in organizations, which includes three primary components: (1) the virtuous mean, (2) a VBO and (3) the buffering role of a VBO. At the core of our model is the virtuous mean or the excellences of character that defines an

individual. We then link the virtuous mean to EDM by introducing the construct of a VBO. We also modify Rest's (1986) primarily linear model by highlighting the role of self-reflection in developing a VBO. Lastly, we illustrate how a VBO functions as a buffer against dysfunctional behaviour in the face of strong situational pressures.

### The Virtuous Mean

In contrast to consequentialist or deontological frameworks, the heart of our model uses a virtue ethical perspective built around Aristotle's characterization of the virtuous mean. It is important to note that by "mean" Aristotle does not imply average or moderation, but rather that one's disposition is to display particular character strengths associated with the virtuous mean (*Nicomachean ethics* 1109a20). It is also important to note that only character strengths, not the virtues themselves, can be observed in excess. Virtuousness here "is what individuals aspire to be when they are at their very best ... that which represents the highest of the human condition" (Cameron 2006, p. 319). As discussed, these character strengths are associated with both universal virtues and motivational values.

However, prior research that has tried to integrate values with EDM has not adequately distinguished between this virtuous mean and its close corollaries, vices of excess or deficiency. For example, while we have argued that the virtue of courage when associated with the value of openness to change could be observed in the character strength of bravery, self-enhancement when coupled with the excess of this character strength (recklessness), or the deficiency of bravery (cowardice), would quite likely lead to negative individual or societal outcomes.

This observation suggests that developing the capacity to operate within the virtuous mean is crucial to deepening character strengths. We suggest that this process can be understood as two different trajectories—a deepening of character strengths within the mean as opposed to adding to (or taking from) the mean which leads to excess (or deficiency) of that character strength. By deepening within the mean, there is a strengthening of character rather than simply an accumulation of experiences that may serve to shift the character strength away from a virtue to a vice. In developing the virtue of courage, therefore, one may develop habits or routines that exhibit the character strengths of perseverance, bravery or integrity, thus deepening within the mean, but must simultaneously avoid being reckless, righteous, or a zealot which would indicate a shift to an excess of these character strengths and hence a vice. Table 1 summarizes the difference between deepening character strengths within the mean versus accumulating experiences that lead to excess or deficiency of character strengths.

These two very different trajectories have been lost in prior research and yet may have significant implications for EDM. There are two primary points to consider in this regard. The first is in the examination of how virtues and their closely associated vices of excess and deficiency affect EDM. The second is how EDM may enhance or undermine the development of character within the virtuous mean. For example, using Rest's (1986) four-component model of EDM, individuals may find a virtue shifting to a vice when they take action for which there is little or no concrete or specific feedback from their peers that signals the shift, as for example in the case of integrity that eventually turns into becoming self-righteous. In contrast, development within the virtuous mean would arise when there is reinforcement for character strengths and in particular when there has been some stretch in the enactment of the character strength as might occur, for example, when someone forgives a significant other even though it is painful to do so. The development within the mean is thus an integral part of a VBO, a construct which we discuss in the next section.

### Virtue-Based Orientation (VBO)

To link the virtuous mean to EDM, we introduce the construct of a VBO which we define as a capacity to deepen character strengths along the mean through self-reflection while avoiding the vices of excess or deficiency. Because virtues are habituated, this process is iterative and requires deep contemplation regarding one's responses to ethical dilemmas. As such, we introduce self-reflection as a mediator to Rest's (1986) EDM model and depict the sequence as circular rather than linear to signify the continual learning that occurs when individuals reflect upon one's own, or other's, ethical or unethical conduct (Hill and Stewart 1999). Locke (1991, p. 289) also highlights the importance of reflection in motivational models arguing that "reason does not automatically tell people what is right or wrong, it confronts people with the responsibility of validating their knowledge. However, they can default on their responsibility and not exert the effort that thinking requires." This suggests that choosing to think or to reflect about "what values they should pursue and the validity of the values other people have told them to pursue; whether and how to apply their values to a specific situation" (Locke 1991, p. 297) is something determined by individual volition. We concur with Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) that reflection should be understood as reflection-in-action not simply reflection on or after action. Reflection-in-action leaves room for understanding reflection as embedded in practice and embodied in action, not simply as a cognitive function.

**Table 1** Deepening within the mean versus beyond the mean

Virtue	Deficiency	Mean	Excess
Wisdom	Unoriginality Closed to experience Closed minded Apathy	<b>Creativity</b> <b>Curiosity</b> <b>Open Mindedness</b> <b>Love of Learning</b>	Impracticality Unfocused interest Lack of judgement Obsessive
Courage	Cowardice Laziness Inauthenticity	<b>Bravery</b> <b>Persistence</b> <b>Integrity</b>	Recklessness Zealot Righteousness
Humanity	Harsh/Cruel Unfeeling Stinginess Socially awkward	<b>Kindness</b> <b>Compassion</b> <b>Generosity</b> <b>Social Intelligence</b>	Obsequious Indulgent Profligacy Manipulative
Justice	Treachery Unjust Lack of confidence	<b>Citizenship</b> <b>Fairness</b> <b>Leadership</b>	Blind obedience Undiscerning Dictatorship
Temperance	Unmerciful Boastfulness Rash Sloth	<b>Forgiveness</b> <b>Humility</b> <b>Prudence</b> <b>Self-regulation</b>	Pushover Self-deprecation Overly cautious Inflexible
Transcendence	Ungrateful Hopeless Spiritlessness	<b>Gratitude</b> <b>Hope</b> <b>Spirituality</b>	Suppliant Behaviour Foolishness Fundamentalism

Without this step of self-reflection, Rest's (1986) model of EDM assumes that individuals confront each new ethical issue as independent from previous experience with ethical dilemmas. However, research does not support this assumption; people can and do learn from previous ethical decisions and can thus increase their capacity for moral reasoning (Sadler-Smith 2012; Schmidt et al. 2009). As such, existing models and empirical tests of EDM do not adequately account for the correlated nature of one's response to new ethical decisions with one's experience with past ethical decisions. A VBO explicitly includes this deliberate reflection about the kind of person one would like to become, as part of the capacity to deepen character strengths along the virtuous mean. Our view is consistent with the work of Bandura (1986, 1991) whose extensive research has demonstrated that behaviour is motivated and regulated by the ongoing process of self-influence. Self-monitoring of behaviour and associated outcomes is a cornerstone of the self-regulation process.

Because we define a VBO as the capacity to deepen character strengths along the virtuous mean through self-reflection, we conceptualize a VBO as something that can be developed. As such, we use orientation in the sense that one is either more or less aligned with a VBO and that a VBO can thus also be observed in terms of degree.

The VBO and capacity for self-reflection does not, however, suggest that EDM is a purely rational process and

that individuals must engage in "deliberate and extensive reasoning as a precursor for ethical behaviour" (Sonenshein 2007, p. 1024). Rather, we argue that without a VBO and self-reflection, individuals are more likely to fail to learn from previous situations and hence are more likely to shift unconsciously towards the vices of excess or deficiency. As such, a VBO model is neither purely rational nor purely intuitionist, but rather a combination of both. Individual values which drive behaviour are largely unconscious; however, individuals have the capacity to reflect on these values and therefore to change their behaviour. In this manner, a VBO to EDM can also serve as a buffer against strong situational pressures to act unethically.

#### The Buffering Role of a VBO

Given the results of several well-known experiments in social psychology (e.g., Milgram's obedience studies, the good Samaritan lecture and intervention, Zimbardo's prison experiment, and the Robbers Cave experiment), many researchers have suggested that "character doesn't matter" in questions of EDM. Because otherwise "good" individuals are willing to commit "bad" acts under particular circumstances, critics argue that character strengths can not be understood as stable and consistent but rather that they will bend to the particular demands of the



situation. For example, despite being compassionate, kind and caring, individuals still administered what they considered to be excruciating electrical shocks to innocent participants if so instructed by a person of authority or failed to help someone in need if they were personally late for another appointment (Zimbardo 2008). In this manner, situationalists suggest that relying on issues of character to explain EDM is futile as it can not address why even virtuous people might behave in an uncharacteristically unvirtuous manner; strong character alone cannot prevent unethical behaviour (Alzola 2012; Homiak 2007).

In response, ethicists have examined the degree of moral intensity, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility for deleterious behaviour, strength of organizational culture and other situational or issue specific moderators to explain the deviation from otherwise virtuous decisions. For example, Jones (1991) argued, and research has supported (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005), that specific characteristics of the moral issue itself (e.g., magnitude of consequences, degree of social consensus) can affect the likelihood of ethical behaviour. Other situational determinants suggested to affect EDM include cultural, industry and environmental factors (Hunt and Vitell 1986), job context and organizational culture (Treviño 1986) and perception of rewards and punishments (Ashkanasy et al. 2006). In fact, a recent meta-analysis of the individual, issue and organizational determinants of EDM found that organizational climates that emphasize self-interest promoted unethical behaviour while benevolent, principled ethical climates and stronger ethical cultures are inversely related to unethical choices (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010).

However, individuals do vary in the degree to which they are susceptible to these situational pressures (Treviño 1986) and previous experience and reflection on ethical dilemmas appears to bolster one's resolve. Comer and Vega (2008, p. 129) introduce the idea of personal ethical thresholds to describe

how vulnerable the individual is to situational factors in his or her organization, i.e., how little or how much in the way of these contingencies it takes for organizational members to cross their proverbial line, acting in a way they consider unethical.

Not everyone in the Milgram studies, for example, was completely compliant to authority—in fact, 35 % disobeyed. In replication studies, this rate of disobedience has ranged from 12 to 72 %, indicating significant variance in individual response to situational pressures (Zimbardo 2008). Joseph Dimow, a participant in the original Milgram studies, recently reflected on why he declined to obey the “teacher's” orders to administer greater shocks to the

“learner”, attributing his dissent to a suspicion of authority born out of early experiences in political and military organizations (Dimow 2004). The circular nature of a VBO to EDM that includes self-reflection on previous experiences can thus serve as a buffer against the strong pressures of external situations to act against one's virtuous core.

We argue then that when a VBO model of EDM is fully engaged, individuals are better equipped to cope with situational pressures and are thus better equipped to make ethical decisions. We see a VBO as operating in degrees—one can have more or less of it and it is through the circularity of the EDM model and self-reflection in particular that one develops, or habituates, a greater VBO. The VBO can therefore be seen as a coping response—a self-control strategy that facilitates the maintenance of behaviours that are deemed desirable (Marx 1982). In the case of low VBO, external forces—situational pressures, business norms and the moral intensity of the issue itself—will overwhelm the EDM process. In contrast, a greater degree of VBO suggests that virtues, character strengths and values work together to overcome situational pressures in the EDM process. The capacity to accumulate experiences that deepen character strengths along the virtuous mean while avoiding the second trajectory of accumulating experiences that go beyond the mean into the vices of excess or deficiency plays a buffering or moderating role.

The idea that virtuousness can buffer individuals against negative performance has been observed in studies of positive psychological states such as “courage, optimism, faith, integrity, forgiveness, and compassion [that] have been found to protect against psychological distress, addiction, and dysfunctional behaviour” (Caza et al. 2004, p. 174). The growing body of literature in positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), positive organizational behaviour (Luthans 2002) and positive organization scholarship (Cameron et al. 2003) suggests that striving for the highest in human potential can enable individuals and the organizations they work for to withstand detrimental individual, group and organizational outcomes (Caza et al. 2004; Cameron 2006).

In summary, we propose that these three core elements—the virtuous mean, a VBO and the buffering role of a VBO—serve as a model to augment existing consequentialist and deontological accounts of EDM. While evaluating the costs–benefits of a decision on all parties (consequentialist framing) in light of universal principles of duty and obligation (deontological framing) is critical to EDM, a virtue ethical perspective allows one to also consider the interplay between character strengths and values as drivers of a VBO approach to ethical dilemmas. It also highlights the critical, mediating role of self-reflection in a continuous learning model of EDM.

## Core Premises of the VBO Model

Having presented the major components of our model, we now transition to a statement of claims or core premises that underpin the model. They are intended to capture the core ideas of the model and in some cases are established points building on prior theory, and in others, more novel insights that arise from our theorizing. In all cases, these claims form the foundation of our theoretical model.

1. Character strengths are the positive behavioural dispositions associated with a set of universal virtues.
2. Character strengths shift from the virtuous mean to vice if manifest in either their excess or deficiency.
3. Character strengths are developed through experiences that deepen the strength without depleting it (deficiency) or embellishing it (excess).
4. Values provide the motivational force that influences the disposition towards experiences that deepen character strengths and virtues.
5. Individuals choose to activate (or not) a VBO to EDM by engaging in self-reflection on previous experiences with ethical dilemmas. Self-knowledge and feedback are a sine qua non for self-reflection and hence learning to occur.
6. A VBO buffers or moderates the effects of situational forces on EDM. Situational forces dominate EDM under the consequentialist paradigm in the case of low VBO.
7. In the case of low VBO, where a deontological approach anchored in shareholder value maximization reigns, situational forces will be filtered through that lens alone.
8. The more complex and conflictual the forces, the greater the need for a VBO.
9. Most decisions have an ethical component but are not perceived as such. Character strengths provide a means to bridge EDM to decision making in general through the construct of VBO.
10. It is through the circularity of Rest's EDM model and through the mediating role of self-reflection that individuals develop a VBO. The development of a VBO is a conscious process that becomes habitual and intuitive with experience.

Having outlined the principle components of the VBO model as well as the underlying core premises that link virtues, values, character strengths and EDM, we now turn to a discussion about the implications of the model for theory, teaching and practice.

## Discussion

In the last several decades, research on virtues, values, character strengths and EDM has been abundant. However,

most theories and empirical tests have focused on just a fragment of the entire nomological network or just one or two aspects of EDM processes without providing an integrative framework (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). Furthermore, most accounts of EDM within organizations implicitly follow a consequentialist framework focused on cost–benefit analysis and ethical outcomes. In contrast, we have proposed herein an integrated model of EDM that incorporates virtues, values and character strengths with both rational and intuitionist models of EDM, delivering a set of premises that provide the opportunity for further theorizing around each of the components of the model. As such, we contribute to theory building in several research domains.

First, many existing models of EDM are implicitly linear, suggesting that individuals approach each new ethical decision in isolation from previous experience. We argue instead that EDM should be seen as circular, and that self-reflection plays a crucial mediating role in the EDM process. It is through self-reflection that individuals can develop a VBO, or a commitment to deepen character strengths along the virtuous mean while avoiding the vices of excess and deficiency. This critical element has been previously overlooked in (or explicitly left out of) existing EDM models, despite increasing evidence regarding the importance of self-reflection in moral development and EDM (Schmidt et al. 2009).

Second, previous research into the role of values and EDM has also implicitly privileged some values over others (e.g. self-transcendence over self-interest) as motivators of ethical behaviour (Agle and Caldwell 1999). However, this may in fact mask how values and virtues interact and are manifest in different underlying character strengths and how these character strengths can either be deepened along the virtuous mean or shift through experiences towards vices of excess or deficiency. Understanding this variance within the character strengths associated with the values and virtues may explain some of the equivocal research findings around their relationship to EDM.

Third, most extant studies that report correlations between values and ethical behaviour are largely devoid of any normative content (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008) thus leaving unexplained which processes drive the significant relationship between values and behaviour (i.e. the black-box phenomenon). In contrast, we propose that it is precisely a virtue ethical perspective that is missing from existing models of EDM. Given that it has been shown that both consequentialist and deontological considerations have an impact on EDM (e.g. Groves et al. 2008), we argue that a virtue ethical perspective will also have an impact on EDM, particularly through the deepening of character strengths around the virtuous mean, the development of a

VBO and the buffering role of the VBO in guarding against situational pressures.

Fourth, our model of EDM is not meant to imply that all that is required to consistently make ethical decisions is a VBO. Rather, it is meant to highlight that in the case of a low VBO, both consequentialist and deontological frameworks privilege a process of awareness, judgement, intent and behaviour that is less resistant to situational pressures. For example, a stakeholder theory of EDM, which is a fundamentally consequentialist theory of decision making, would define the right or ethical decision as that which satisfies or balances the needs of the most salient firm stakeholders (e.g. shareholders, customers, suppliers or employees). The “good” CEO is then the one who is able to balance all of these internal and external situational demands in a manner that maximizes the net utility for all stakeholders. The danger here, of course, is that the EDM process gets overwhelmed by situational pressures that dictate the right course of action and the CEO may be accused of being inconsistent or lacking clear principles. A virtue ethical perspective, on the other hand, such as the VBO model proposed, would ask an entirely different set of questions to ascertain what the right decision may be or what the “good” CEO may decide to do.

Take for example the recent case of Maple Leaf Foods and the 2008 listeria outbreak in Canada, in which more than 20 people died and hundreds fell ill as a result of consuming contaminated meat. The situation was highly complex in that seemingly incompatible pressures emerged—short term profit versus long term sustainability and conflicting stakeholder perspectives, to mention a few. A purely consequentialist framing, especially one focused on shareholder wealth protection, may have suggested the best course of action was to deny any responsibility, to continue to defend this decision, and to try to lay blame for deaths and illnesses elsewhere. Similarly, a purely deontological framing may also have delayed response as one debated the rights, responsibilities and duties of all intermediaries involved in handling the contaminated meat products. In contrast, building in a virtue-based approach provides insight not solely on the response or the outcome of the response, but to the nature of the individuals involved in leading the response to the crisis. A VBO allows us to ask—what would a courageous, temperate or wise CEO do in such a situation?

Maple Leaf Foods launched an immediate recall of the suspected contaminated products to mitigate the risk to consumers and closed their processing plant within a day of the listeria reports. The recalls and the collection and destruction of the recalled products cost Maple Leaf Foods tens of millions of dollars. The CEO, Michael McCain, gave a press conference as soon as word of the outbreak reached him, and publicly apologized to all Canadians,

expressing his sympathy for those affected. The CEO took personal accountability for the problems and showed compassion. As the crisis unfolded, television spots and advertisements gave updates on what the company was learning through its investigation. It provided specific plans to correct the problem. Additional structures and processes have been put in place since the crisis to help Maple Leaf Foods become a global leader in food safety.

In dealing with the crisis, the CEO’s approach was decisive and transparent, displaying character strengths of leadership and fairness as associated with the virtue of justice. Michael McCain acted with honesty and integrity in dealing with all stakeholders, character strengths associated with the virtue of courage. He behaved with open mindedness and an unwavering commitment to social responsibility, character strengths associated with the virtues of wisdom. Throughout the days and weeks that followed the outbreak, he showed a great sense of compassion and kindness, character strengths that are a reflection of humanity. Last but not least, he did so with great humility, a character strength associated with the virtue of temperance. No doubt there were deontological and consequentialist elements to his decision making, however, the VBO element was clear. As Nyberg (2007, p. 587) argued: “... traditional ethical theories (consequentialism and deontology) are not suitable ... since universal principles and rules leave little room for the ambiguity and everydayness of situated work activities.” These theories have challenges capturing complex organizational practices—situations with information uncertainties and ambiguities; situations that involve ethical leadership predicaments; and moral dilemmas embedded in the decision-making context (Beabout 2012). A VBO to EDM thus has the potential to free individuals from purely consequentialist frameworks without committing them to a purely shareholder duty (deontological) perspective. It is essential in complex or turbulent situations where there is no immediate or straightforward plan of action.

Last, the three components of a VBO model—the virtuous mean, the VBO, and the buffering role of a VBO—can also be applied to decision making in general, not only to EDM. Many strategic decision-making models are similarly anchored in a problem identification, judgement and selection sequence, which have been depicted as either purely rational or bounded rational processes (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki 1992). Models of bounded rationality suggest that individuals are plagued by cognitive limitations and thus rely heavily on established routines to make strategic judgements (e.g. base rate fallacy, confirmation bias, or bandwagon effect). We argue that this routinization of decision making can easily incorporate a VBO in that the habituation process that is inherent in cultivating the virtues of character, just as inculcating routines around

shareholder value maximization, is something that occurs with practice. Reflecting on the routines within the organization can therefore surface the underlying normative framework that is being applied and hence improve decision-making over time.

The foregoing describes contributions to current research, however the model also provides opportunity for future research. We address these opportunities as they relate to the various components of the model.

With respect to the character strengths and virtues, there is opportunity to develop the model by delving more deeply into the role of each of the virtues and their relationship to EDM. We have not advocated any particular role for each of the virtues and it remains to be seen how these character strengths interact with each other and how they support EDM. It is quite possible that some are more important than others and that combinations of various character strengths and virtues reveal themselves as working together in unique ways. For example, research has suggested that humility, a character strength associated with the virtue of temperance, may also be associated with openness to new ideas and a love of learning (Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez 2004), which are traditionally character strengths reflective of the virtue of wisdom. It could be then that temperance and wisdom work together in the development of a VBO to EDM in that individuals who are disposed to a love of learning are more open to self-reflection and when coupled with humility or self-regulation are better equipped to engage in balanced processing of both positive and negative feedback. More interestingly, future research could also investigate if there are particular virtues or character strengths that work against each other to prevent the development of a VBO to EDM.

Although related to the former point, there is an additional opportunity to examine the relationship between values, virtues and the components of EDM as described by Rest (1986). For example, as discussed, the character strength of compassion, associated with the virtue of humanity, has been shown to increase the attention and concern paid to other members of the organization who are suffering (Dutton et al. 2006), thereby providing support that this character strength may impact the first stage in the EDM process—awareness. However, how does compassion affect judgement, intent or behaviour? How does this character strength relate to self-reflection? How does the deficiency (unfeeling) or excess (indulgent) of compassion affect EDM? While our model identifies the individual components of EDM, it was beyond the scope of this paper to develop hypotheses around the specific relationships. It is quite possible that values and virtues play different roles relative to the components we have identified.

Understanding the factors that enable individuals to deepen character strengths within the virtuous mean as

opposed to those that lead to excess or deficiency in the context of management education and in organizations is an important avenue of inquiry. Claims have been made suggesting that management education programs may fuel the development of excess especially in terms of prioritizing self-enhancement values (Krishnan 2008) and furthermore, that in doing so, they are part of the problem, not the solution (Bennis and O'Toole 2005). These are very serious claims. Our model is ideally suited to examine these claims and examine the role of management education programs in fostering a VBO (or not). The question is both one of content and of process: To what degree does the content mastered in business programs implicitly or explicitly endorse a consequentialist or deontological ethical framework over a virtue-based one? Does the process of teaching organizational behaviour, leadership, strategy, finance, accounting or marketing encourage and support the development of a VBO? Similarly, organizations are also not exempt from culpability in the factors that may lead to either developing excess or deficiency in employee character strengths. For example, compensation and other reward systems may motivate behaviours that are inconsistent with the virtuous mean. As well, organizational culture may be misaligned and in fact may be one of the external pressures for which individuals need a strong VBO to withstand. There are several examples where organizational culture steered individuals away from making good decisions, including Enron, Lehman Brothers and NASA. As such, understanding individual and structural determinants of a VBO is a promising avenue for future research.

Although we have described our model at the individual level, there is opportunity to take a multi-level view of the phenomenon to understand how values, virtues and character strengths relate to EDM at the group, organization and societal levels. In particular, we need to better understand how an individual with a strong VBO can influence EDM at the group level or even the organizational level. Given the variance observed in individual responses to situational pressures (Zimbardo 2008), we expect to find variance in the degree of VBO of individual employees, and that individuals are therefore at least partially independent of group and organizational influences. However, because a VBO is habituated through practice, group-level variables (e.g. group identity, trust) may also have a direct effect on individual character strength development. Unpacking the cross-level effects of a VBO to EDM thus holds considerable promise for future empirical testing. We consider such research paramount since there are few individuals, even those with a strong VBO, who will be able to sustain virtuous behaviour amidst others in the organization, or industry, who take actions inconsistent with a VBO. Therefore, understanding the multi-level interactions will be essential.



Finally, there is a tremendous need and also a wealth of opportunity to examine the interplay between VBO and external forces to better understand the situational determinants that challenge a VBO. We have cited prior research that presents sobering findings about the strength of external forces in shaping individual behaviour, often for the worse (Zimbardo 2008). However, such research has not examined the possibility of developing a strong VBO to withstand the adverse effect of these forces, or indeed how individuals with a strong VBO can shape situational forces. Rather, the need for heroism is suggested as the antidote to enduring negative situational pressures (Zimbardo 2008). In contrast, our model, which is based on the fundamental quest for excellence, not heroism, provides a more useful starting point to examine the role of virtues, values and character strengths in EDM that may provide important answers to these pressing issues.

## Conclusion

While there has been a renewed call to re-examine the role of character development in light of recent ethical and financial crises, surprisingly little attention has been given to articulating a virtue ethical framework of decision making. In fact, there has been a deliberate shift away from character-based models with the prevalence of social psychological research into situational determinants of ethical behaviour. Yet, a return to the fundamentals of virtue ethics, including a deeper understanding of the character strengths associated with virtues and the values these reflect, has the potential to inform the EDM processes now required not only of organizational leaders but of managers at all levels given an increasingly global environment.

Given the almost entirely descriptive nature of most EDM research, it is not surprising that virtues, motivational values and character strengths have been largely excluded from recent reviews of the EDM field (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Loe et al. 2000; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005; Treviño et al. 2006). Furthermore, where ethical frameworks have been tested, these have focused primarily on consequentialist versus deontological distinctions and have not included a virtue ethical perspective (e.g. Brady and Wheeler 1996; Fritzsche and Becker 1984; Groves et al. 2008). In taking a virtue ethical perspective, therefore, we elevate the assessment of personal character (being) to the same status afforded to the assessment of ethical or unethical acts (doing). This answers the call to integrate a more balanced approach to EDM which incorporates a discussion of virtues and character strengths into a consequence-based or duty-based evaluation of moral behaviour. Further, it strives to answer a more general call with

regards to a renewed interest in the role of virtues, values and character traits in broader leadership theories (Arjoon 2000; Manz et al. 2008; Solomon 1992).

Importantly, because the distinction between decisions with and without ethical implications can be difficult to discern, a VBO can be generalized to apply to all decision making and does not need to be contained to the realm of ethical discourse. The four components of EDM—awareness, judgement, intent and behaviour—are germane to many rational decision-making models (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki 1992). A commitment to cultivating character strengths along the mean while avoiding depleting or embellishing these character strengths thus applies to strategic decisions just as much as to more proximal ethical dilemmas. The VBO model therefore can be used alongside consequentialist and deontological assessments of alternate courses of action.

We acknowledge that the VBO presents a somewhat ideal type of EDM, where a commitment to the virtuous mean and the development of a VBO can serve as a buffer to strong situational pressures. However, we understand that “realistically, a truly virtuous manager is an unrealizable ideal, but nevertheless represents a set of virtuous character dispositions toward which a real—and necessarily imperfect—manager can strive” (Whetstone 2001, p. 107). The commitment to deepen character strengths within the mean without shifting to the vices of deficiency or excess requires practice, as Aristotle argued:

The virtues on the other hand we acquire by first having actually practised them, just as we do the arts. We learn an art or craft by doing the things that we shall have to do when we have learnt it: for instance, men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp. Similarly we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts (*Nicomachean ethics* 1103a31–1103b1).

We thus argue that a VBO to EDM is an acquirable skill (Crossan et al. 2013). Like Hartman (2006, p. 69), we believe that education has a role to play in character development and that training in ethics “can improve students’ character by helping them think critically about their values and realize them in practice.” Further, research in this area has demonstrated that individuals can, in fact, increase their level of moral reasoning which is a critical component of character in that higher levels of moral reasoning require virtuous character strengths such as justice, fairness, humanity and compassion (Schmidt et al. 2009). We are thus optimistic that re-introducing a VBO model of EDM alongside consequentialist and deontological frameworks can contribute to the habituation of routines anchored in the virtuous mean.



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