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Morality and Leadership in Work Organizations:
Developing a Normative Model

by

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Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of PhD of
Loughborough University
December 2008

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Morality and Leadership in Work Organizations: Developing a Normative Model

Abstract

Leadership is a morally ambivalent notion. While leaders of organizations may have the capacity to do a great deal of good, they can also do a great deal of harm. Furthermore, there is something intuitively disconcerting about the idea of individual leaders exerting disproportionate influence over other people. My objective in this PhD is to develop an understanding of what moral leadership might look like. I approach this question through a number of different avenues. I begin by reviewing the leadership literature to see what it has to say about morality. In particular, I consider the extent to which the literature, in responding to the moral concerns mentioned above, either ameliorates or exacerbates those concerns. I then consider moral leadership and from the perspective of ethical theory. Taking a representative cross-section of different meta-ethical stances, I consider the implications that principle-based, existentialist and intersubjectivist theory might hold for moral leadership. Lastly, I attempt to find out what some leaders have to say about morality. Using semi-structured discussions with sixteen people who hold formal leadership roles in large organizations, I identify a number of themes that characterise the way that they think about the ethical dimension of leadership.

I draw out the implications of the perspectives that emerge from each of these separate avenues of enquiry, also highlighting relationships between different perspectives. I take the view that each of these perspectives offers some positive insights into what moral leadership might comprise but that each may also lead to some troubling ramifications. While a simple template for moral leadership is likely to remain elusive, sensitivity to the positive and less positive implications of these various perspectives will enable a more enlightened response to the ethical challenges presented within different leadership contexts. I conclude that an intersubjectively facilitative style will be better placed to respond to the moral challenges presented by leading in organizations than will more monological or oligarchic approaches.
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Key words
Leadership
Morality
Ethics
Normative
Organizations
Intersubjectivity
Facilitation
Habermas
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author of this PhD offers his sincere thanks to Professor Peter Ackers and Professor Laurie Cohen for their invaluable advice and encouragement during its production.
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1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

My objective in this PhD is to develop an understanding of what moral leadership in work organizations looks like. In other words, I am trying to get a picture of what leading in a morally desirable way consists of. This is a worthwhile undertaking for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that, despite the high regard in which leadership is generally held in contemporary Western culture, it is also a potentially troubling notion. On the one hand, the clamour for better, more effective leaders assaults us from all directions. The attention devoted to the appointment of political leaders, the “compensation packages” awarded to business leaders and the attention devoted to leadership development in all sorts of organizations are testimony to the importance that we attach to leadership. The person at the top seems to be more important to the electability of a political party, and also to its suitability to govern, than the nature of its ideology, the capabilities of its members of parliament or the quality of its administrative systems. Such is our expectation of the impact that leaders can make on businesses that CEOs are able to command remuneration that exceeds that of their employees by multiples of more than three figures. And the ever increasing profile of leadership programmes on the web sites of corporate training companies indicates that leadership is in big demand and that developing it is big business.

However, despite our apparently insatiable demand for leadership, leaders can be very scary. The political and business landscapes of the twentieth century are littered with highly effective leaders who are held responsible for situations which most today consider to be at least questionable, and at most downright deplorable. Clearly being good at leadership is no guarantee for being a good leader in a moral sense. Furthermore, there is something conceptually troubling about the notion of individuals using exceptional influencing skills to move the masses. Such a one-sided power relationship seems worryingly at odds with the democratic ideals which define the self-understanding of the Western world. This is perhaps why it is easy to detect, within the field of so called “critical” organization studies, an air of suspicious disdain when the subject of leadership is mentioned.

The importance of the relationship between organizational leadership and morality also becomes apparent when we consider the way in which we use these terms. What do we generally mean when we talk of “leadership”? Joseph Rost (1991) considers two-hundred-and-twenty-one definitions of leadership, selecting those that he considers to be most
representative of different eras. Despite the generational variations that Rost identifies, a common characteristic is that leadership is understood as a process of social influence: it is generally considered to involve the exercise of influence by one person over the behaviour and attitudes of other people. Of course, any social situation involves an interchange of influence between its participants (Pondy, 1978); exerting influence is not the unique preserve of leaders. When we speak of leadership, though, we generally refer to a degree of influence over-and above the norm in terms of either its magnitude or its scope. We understand leaders to be people who exercise an exceptional amount of influence, often over multitudes of people rather than over isolated individuals. Leadership within a work organization, then, comprises the exercise of influence by one person over the behaviour and attitudes of other people. And the more effective the leadership is, the greater its impact. This is why leadership is considered to be a desirable quality for those who perform management roles within work organizations\(^1\): in order to be a successful manager, it is generally considered necessary to be an effective leader.

So if leadership generally refers to the application of influence on a grand scale, what do we mean by “morality”? Morality, or ethics\(^2\), is concerned with the meaning of terms such as “right”, “wrong”, “good” and “bad” in relation to human conduct. It considers the criteria by which a person’s relationships with other people, other sentient beings and the non-sentient environment might be evaluated with respect to such terms. All human behaviour can, to some extent, be subject to moral evaluation. However, given the exceptional degree of influence that effective leaders wield over other people, leadership is an undertaking that is particularly laden with moral implications. With leadership, there is a multiplier effect at play that is not present with most person-to-person interactions. And since, by definition, effective leadership is likely to have a greater influence over other people than ineffective leadership, the moral implications of the former are proportionally greater. The more successful the leader is, the more important the morality of leadership becomes. In the case of leadership within work organizations, successful leaders tend to have a substantial impact on those who work within those organizations, on society in general and on the natural environment. Therefore, the impact that leaders have and the manner in which they achieve that impact merit consideration.

\(^1\) Putting aside, for the time being, the distinction that is sometimes made between leadership and management, which I will return to later.

\(^2\) A distinction is sometimes made between morality and ethics. “Morality” is used to describe the moral commitments of a particular person or a culture, whereas “ethics” is used to describe the discipline which involves theoretical and/or empirical consideration of various moralities. However, it is more common, particularly in general discourse, to use these terms synonymously. In this PhD I will therefore follow this more common convention.
However, despite our moral ambivalence about leadership and the significance of its moral ramifications, the relationship between morality and leadership has received relatively little attention in the leadership literature. The last seventy years have witnessed escalating interest in the theory and practice of leadership. However, the focus of this interest has been predominantly effectiveness-based. While theorists and practitioners have been eager to identify the behaviours, personal qualities and circumstances that contribute to effective leadership, the moral dimension of that effectiveness has, to a large extent, been neglected. Consequently, managers who seek to become more successful by developing their leadership skills do not want for theoretical guidance. On the other hand, those who wish to make sense of the specific moral challenges presented by the leadership role have few resources upon which to draw.

By considering the relationship between morality and leadership, my PhD therefore aims to make a contribution to remedying this shortcoming. It proceeds in four stages. I will begin by reviewing the leadership literature. I will structure this review around the reservations about leadership to which I have already alluded: firstly, the possibility that leaders may apply their exceptional influencing skills to achieve outcomes that are of dubious moral quality; secondly, that there is something inherently suppressive and worryingly asymmetrical about the notion of leadership. In discussing the literature, I will consider the extent to which it either ameliorates or exacerbates these concerns.

Clearly, in order to make sense of the moral implications of leadership, we need to have some idea of how we might attribute and evaluate moral probity in the context of organizational leadership. Therefore, having looked at morality from the perspective of the leadership literature, I will next approach the relationship from the opposite direction and consider leadership through the lens of moral philosophy. This is an ambitious undertaking: whereas the leadership literature has evolved over a short span of seventy years or so, and has only really gathered momentum in the last twenty-five, the ethics literature spans more than two millennia. Therefore, my review of the latter is necessarily undertaken in summary form and must be selective. I will structure this review around three meta-ethical perspectives, or three different ways of thinking about morality. I will refer to these as principle-based ethics, existentialist ethics and intersubjectivist ethics. After outlining some core ideas behind each of these meta-ethical perspectives, I will explore the implications that each holds for organizational leadership. Although the theories that I discuss do not exhaust the range of ways in which we might think about ethics, they do comprise a fairly representative cross-section. They therefore offer a reasonably diverse framework from which to conduct my enquiry into leadership and ethics.
The third stage of the PhD looks at leadership and ethics from an empirical perspective. I will use discussions with practising leaders — people who occupy prominent formal leadership roles in work organizations — in order to explore how they think about the ethical implications of their roles. I will consider the extent to which their different understandings respond to the areas of moral concern discussed in the first section. I will also explore the extent to which they articulate the three meta-ethical perspectives discussed in the second section. I thus hope to add further insights to both. I will also draw attention to the implications of the various perspectives manifested by research participants and any tensions which they may present.

My approach in these three sections comprises a synthesis of the theoretical and the empirical, in which each is used to elucidate the other. Thus, I will draw upon theoretical perspectives within both leadership and ethics literature to provide a framework for undertaking and interpreting empirical research. At the same time, I will use empirical enquiry to illuminate specific theoretical perspectives. In this iterative manner, I hope to draw out the implications of the perspectives that emerge from each of separate avenues of enquiry, also highlighting relationships between different perspectives.

I will structure my fourth and concluding section around some key themes that emerge from my theoretical and empirical research. I take the view that each of these themes may offer some helpful insights into what moral leadership might comprise. However, each may also present some troubling ramifications. I will try to identify both the former and the latter. I will then propose a normative model of ethical leadership; one which seeks to embrace the positive insights of these various themes while avoiding their troubling ramifications. I will end with some reflection on the feasibility of such a normative model in contemporary work organizations.

The overall spirit that drives this PhD is a normative one. That is, as the Oxford Companion to Philosophy puts it, it seeks to “proffer moral guidance, instruction or a guide for appraising judgement”, or as Hugh Willmott defines normative ethics, “it is most directly engaged with the process of developing a judgemental standpoint about what is (deemed to be) right and wrong” (1998: 78). However, I do not believe that, in order to propose a normative ethic, it is necessary to adopt an objectivist meta-ethic. In this respect, my own meta-ethical sympathies lie closest to the third of those that I describe in my review of the ethics literature: the intersubjectivist. I do not seek to uncover universal ethical standards that await discovery but nor do I view ethics as little more than a matter of personal or
cultural choice. I believe that, as Richard Bernstein (1983) proposes, it is possible to go "Beyond Objectivism and Relativism" and that the route to that "going beyond" lies in intersubjectivist theory. I hope that my synthesis of a broad range of theoretical and empirical perspectives is true to that dialogical agenda.

Nevertheless, despite the overall, intersubjectively normative tone of my research, it is built upon foundations that have both positivist and interpretive elements. My review of the leadership literature owes a positivist debt insofar as most of that research has a strong positivist flavour. Most leadership research is driven by a belief that certain behaviours, personal qualities and circumstances enable effective leadership and that these behaviours, personal qualities and circumstances can be identified and classified. Therefore, in discussing the moral implications raised by this research, I am drawing upon material that is, to a large extent, positivist in its methodological orientation.

The third part of my research, the empirical part, comprises its interpretive element. I use my discussions with leaders of organizations to try to get access to their understanding of the moral implications of leading. However, like the positivist tone of the leadership literature, I will try to apply this hermeneutic undertaking to an overall normative agenda. I seek to use the understandings revealed by my interpretive empirical research to generate an enhanced normative understanding of moral leadership.
2.0 LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS

In this section I will review the leadership literature to see what it has to say about morality. I have already mentioned that the literature is overwhelmingly concerned with exploring the grounds of leadership effectiveness and pays relatively little attention to the moral dimension. Even texts whose titles explicitly promise to address the subject (e.g. von Weltzein Hoivik, 2002; Sison, 2003) tend to dwell more generally on the role of ethics in business than on the specific ethical challenges of leadership. Nevertheless, a number of theorists have proposed models of leadership effectiveness that carry an intuitively moral tone. Prominent amongst these are Robert Greenleaf’s discussion of servant leadership (1977), which suggests that the role of the leader is to minister to the needs and aspirations of followers, and James MacGregor Burns’ transforming (or transformational) leadership theory (1978, 2003) which proposes that leaders fulfil an intrinsically moral purpose by enabling followers to satisfy so-called “higher order” needs. Furthermore, the focus on relationship-orientation and on “feminine” leadership traits, which characterises a lot of the literature, carries an intuitive moral allure. Meanwhile, some theorists have responded to charges of moral unresponsiveness in their prescriptions for effective leadership by offering ethically sanitised versions (e.g. Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

Therefore, despite the paucity of systematic treatment of morality (Ciulla,1998b), there is sufficient material concealed within the folds of the curtains of the leadership-effectiveness literature to offer at least a starting point for theoretical enquiry into leadership ethics. Furthermore, far from undermining its relevance to morally-focused enquiry, the leadership literature’s general preoccupation with effectiveness actually enables it to make a useful contribution to such enquiry. In exploring different perspectives on what is involved in being an effective leader, I will be able to consider the extent to which these recipes for effectiveness either exacerbate or ameliorate some moral challenges that are associated with leadership. Accordingly, in this chapter I will draw not only on those elements of the literature that have an explicit link to ethics; I will also draw on discussions of leadership that are explicitly concerned with effectiveness but which are nevertheless relevant to moral enquiry.

I have already mentioned two ways in which leadership may offer grounds for moral concern. The first area of concern relates to the moral probity of the outcomes towards which leaders lead. The notion of effective leadership implies that certain individuals are able to apply exceptional influencing skills to rally support for a particular agenda. If those individuals, those effective leaders, are either morally degenerate or morally injudicious,
they may lead towards outcomes that, from a moral perspective, are undesirable. Leadership effectiveness thus becomes a dangerous tool. The second area of moral concern relates to a vague feeling of discomfort with the very notion of leadership, which I attribute to its connotations of imposition: the imposition of the will of the leader over that of other people. There seems to be something worryingly asymmetrical about leadership-followership relationships; that leaders are expected to exert their agency over and above that of their so-called “followers”. Effective leadership thus courts the challenge that the imposition of the leader’s agenda erodes other people’s capacity to fulfil their own aspirations, to pursue their own interests, to work towards realisation of their own potential or even to pursue their own moral agendas.

I propose to structure this review of the leadership literature around these two areas of concern. I will discuss the extent to which different theories may exacerbate these concerns and also the extent to which various leadership theorists respond to them, either implicitly or explicitly. My discussion will indicate that each of these moral challenges is, in a sense, two pronged. The response adopted by some theorists in responding to the first prong of attack opens them to challenge from a second direction. Thus, in responding to concerns about the ethicality of the agenda towards which leaders lead by reassuring us that leadership effectiveness is normally accompanied by altruistic intent on the part of the leader, some theorists court the challenge of a narrowly-defined altruism; one which prioritises the organization and its interests over and above all other considerations. Similarly, in responding to the challenge to individual agency presented by an impositional leadership style, some commentators suggest that only those leaders who attend to the human-relationship needs of their followers will be able to successfully achieve their desired outcomes. But the focus that these theorists place on building a collective purpose raises concerns about the threat posed to individual agency by a sort of totalitarianism of the majority.

My focus on these particular themes should not be interpreted as an assertion that they are the only possible grounds of moral discomfort with effective leadership; only that each is sufficiently compelling to merit attention during enquiry into the relationship between leadership and morality. Therefore, these themes are not offered as a complete classification of grounds for moral disquiet. They are, rather, offered as a reasonable starting point for theoretical consideration and empirical enquiry on the understanding that, as with the planks of Neurath’s boat (Cartwright, 2005), I have to start from somewhere but that starting point may be subject to revision as my enquiry progresses.
I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on some general issues that arise from discussion of these themes. I will also outline the extent to which the responses to these issues offered by various leadership commentators relate to contrasting perspectives within the broader field of organization and management studies.

**The Moral Probity of Leadership Agendas**

I will begin by considering the extent to which the literature offers a basis for differentiating those leaders who use their leadership talents to bring about morally desirable ends from those who apply them to agendas that are morally reprehensible. The importance of this question is apparent from abundant instances of highly effective leaders who have used that effectiveness to achieve outcomes which, at least in retrospect, are considered to be morally dubious. Commonly cited examples include Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein from the political arena and the likes of Robert Maxwell, Jeffrey Skilling, and Kenneth Lay from the world of business. Some might dismiss the relevance of such examples on the basis that each of these characters, eventually, ran into difficulties. It might be suggested that, since the leadership that they provided ultimately failed, they should be discounted as effective leaders. However, to disregard the importance of their agendas on the basis of their eventual failure would be unwise. The limited tenure of these leaders should not divert attention from the awful consequences of their leadership: Hitler's eventual capitulation did not undo the horrors perpetuated in his name; nor does the demise of Lay and Skilling offer much consolation to the employees, shareholders and pensioners who were impoverished by their greed and duplicity. These people were highly effective in applying their leadership skills for long enough to matter.

Now, it might be asked why the moral tone of leadership agendas should merit particular attention. Surely, it might be argued, the moral tone of any person's agenda is important, so why focus specifically on leaders? I propose that the moral tone of leadership agendas is particularly important just because leaders are not "any person". They are regarded, at least by most of the leadership literature and notwithstanding disagreements about causal direction, as persons who are able to wield considerable influence over the behaviour of other people. So if the moral tone of any person's agenda matters, then the moral tone of a leader's agenda matters a great deal more. The influence which leaders wield amplifies their moral potency. Therefore, the moral probity of leadership agendas is particularly worthy of reflection.
Many commentators are keen to identify organizational leadership with the ability to evoke change, an association which further magnifies the moral significance of leaders’ agendas. Popular business writers (e.g. Peters and Waterman, 1982; Handy, 1993 and 1995; Covey, 1996; Drucker, 2001) draw attention to the flux and instability that characterise the contemporary organizational world. Consequently, those who lead successfully within that environment are those who can adopt dynamic responses to the challenges presented by its fluidity: effective leaders do not seek to maintain the status quo; they engineer change to situations and to people in response to shifting organizational imperatives. Abraham Zalesnic’s (1977) concise summary is that leaders elicit change in order to get organizations where they need to be; managers, on the other hand, merely keep organizations in a steady state. Therefore, the latter do not qualify for the epithet of leader. Similarly, John Kotter (1990) depicts leaders as agents of change who develop and communicate new visions for the future, compared to managers who plan and monitor for the present and the short term. Charismatic leadership theory also applauds the capacity of leaders to bring about revolutionary and visionary change. Max Weber’s (1947 [1924]) seminal description of charismatic authority is characterised by challenge to traditional and legal forms, while Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo (1998) emphasise charismatic leaders’ capacity to envision discrepant organizational goals and to champion creative and innovative ways of achieving them. Linda Smircich and Gareth Morgan (1982) also portray leadership as a dynamic process that challenges prevailing wisdom to uncover new definitions of meaning, while Thayer (1988) reflects on leaders’ capacity to reveal different ways of knowing the world. Effective leaders are also characterised by their ability to evoke changes in those who they lead. James MacGregor Burns (1978, 2003) and Bernard Bass (1985, 1990, 1994) focus on the propensity of transformational leaders to lift people to a better sense of self, contrasting this with transactional exchanges which leave people fundamentally unchanged.

If effective leaders are able to bring about significant change to their environments and to the people whom they lead, then clearly they have the capacity to do a great deal of good. However, any moral allure associated with change assumes that changed situations are morally preferable to the circumstances that they supersede and that changes to people leave those people better off than before. Clearly, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. If, on the one hand, leadership theory conjures visions of pioneering change-agents, selflessly leading organizations and people towards a better future, it is equally prone to images of self-interested or misguided meddlers who, through the application of their leadership talents, leave everything in a considerably worse state to that in which they found it.
Relying on the altruistic intent of the leader

For a number of reasons, then, the moral tone of leadership agendas matters. So how might we distinguish a morally good agenda from a morally bad agenda? One response to this question, offered by transformational and charismatic leadership theorists, is to focus on the hazards presented by leaders’ egotism: altruistically motivated leadership is presented as being morally generative; egotistically motivated leadership as morally degenerative. Bernard Bass and Paul Steidlmeier thus distinguish authentic transformational leaders from inauthentic/pseudo transformational leaders in order to tell those who wear the “white hats of heroes” from those who sport the “black hats of villains” (1999: 187). According to this depiction, authentic transformational leaders place the interests of followers above their own ambition for power and position. Pseudo transformational leaders, on the other hand, are the “inauthentic CEOs [who] downsize their organization, increase their own compensation, and weep crocodile tears for the employees who have lost their jobs” (ibid). Furthermore, authentic transformational leaders channel their need for power “in socially constructive ways in and to the service of others” (ibid: 189), whereas pseudo transformational leaders “use power primarily for self-aggrandisement and are actually contemptuous privately of those they are supposed to be serving as leaders” (ibid).

Researchers into charismatic leadership also emphasise the moral hazards presented by egotistic leaders. Conger and Kanungo observe that charismatic leaders may be prone to “extreme narcissism that leads them to promote highly self-serving and grandiose aims. As a result, a leader’s behaviours can become exaggerated, lose touch with reality, or become vehicles for pure personal gain” (1998: 211). Conger and Kanungo note that this may result in outcomes that are harmful to followers and to the organization, and eventually may not even be in the best interests of the leader.

Just as Bass and Steidlmeier use the authentic-pseudo distinction to tell heroes from villains, charismatic leadership theory has produced its own distinctions to differentiate between the altruistic good guys and the egotistic bad guys. Jane Howell (1988) thus distinguishes between personalised and socialised charisma. The former is concerned primarily with the exertion of power and dominance over others: personalised charismatics only encourage the development of followers insofar as this may contribute to the personal goals of the leader. Socialised charismatics, on the other hand, are motivated by a collective ethic, by so-called “higher-order values” and by a disposition to promote the personal development and intellectual stimulation of followers as an end in itself. Pursuing this distinction between socialised and personalised charismatics, Conger and Kanungo note
that socialised charismatics’ “need for power” is balanced by, “low Machiavellianism” (1998: 212). A personalised charismatic’s need for power, on the other hand, is characterised by “high authoritarianism, high narcissism and high Machiavellianism” (ibid). Conger and Kanungo also allude to Musser’s (1987) distinction between positive and negative charismatic types, the latter of which emphasise devotion to self as opposed to internalisation of the values and ideological goals that they are ostensibly promoting.

These theorists therefore offer criteria against which we can distinguish morally generative transformational and charismatic leadership from morally degenerative transformational and charismatic leadership. However, while these distinctions may assist reflection on the reasons why leadership has gone morally wrong, they offer little reassurance against the prospect of transformationally or charismatically empowered egotists leading towards self-serving ends which are morally undesirable. There seems to be no reason to believe that pseudo transformational and personalised charismatic leaders will be any less successful at leading than their authentic and socialised counterparts. Therefore, the ability to make retrospective and detached distinctions between morally good and morally bad leadership on the basis of egotistic and altruistic intent does little to assuage misgivings about egotists who demonstrate transformational and charismatic flair being placed in positions of considerable power and influence in organizations.

A more comforting picture is offered by Beverley Alimo-Metcalfe and John Alban-Metcalfe’s (2001; 2004; 2005) research into the effectiveness of transformational leadership in British private-sector organizations. Bass and the charismatic theorists have tended to focus their research at the level of observable behaviour, thus deriving prescriptions for leadership effectiveness. They have only gone deeper to consider the level of underpinning values when presented with the possibility that these recipes for effectiveness may be co-opted by “bad”, egotistically-motivated people. The research of Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, on the other hand, is faithful to Louis Pondy’s (1978) injunction that we need to explore leadership effectiveness not only in terms of observable behaviours but also in relation to the values that underpin those behaviours.

Offering a somewhat different account of transformational leadership from that presented by Bass and his colleagues, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe have thus identified correlations between leadership effectiveness and the underpinning motivation of the leader. Noting the difference between their own findings and those of US models, “where vision and charisma [of the leader] dominate” (2005: 57) they find that successful transformational leaders are inclined to value individuals and to show genuine concern for
others' well being and development. Furthermore, they suggest that "this factor is unequivocally the most important aspect of transformational leadership in the UK sample, explaining more variance than all the remaining factors together" (ibid). Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe also find a strong positive correlation between effectiveness and the leader's inclination to consider "the good of the organization as more important than satisfying his/her own personal ambition" (ibid: 60). The reassuring conclusion of Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe's value-sensitive exploration, therefore, is that, at least in the contexts within which they have researched, effective leaders are generally willing to renounce personal gain in the interests of the collective.

A link between altruism with leadership effectiveness is also apparent in Robert Greenleaf's (1977) model of servant-leadership. Greenleaf's work was inspired by his reading of Herman Hesse's novel, Journey to the East. The novel describes a spiritual journey to the East that is undertaken by a group of travellers. The group is accompanied by a servant called Leo. Leo is a remarkable character; in addition to carrying out menial chores on behalf of the group, he sustains morale and spirit by his personal example, binding the group together with his uplifting presence and his songs. All goes well until Leo disappears; then the group falls apart and the journey is abandoned. Some time later, the narrator discoverers that the servant, Leo, is, in fact, the titular head of the spiritual sect that inspired the journey; the leader rather than the servant that the travellers had thought him to be. For Greenleaf, the key point to this story is that Leo was, deep down, driven not by a desire to lead, but by a desire to serve. Servant leaders are those who are driven first and foremost by a desire to serve others. The desire to lead comes later through a process of conscious choice when the servant-leader realises that he or she will be able to serve more productively by taking on a leadership role. Greenleaf contrasts such individuals with those who wish only to lead, either to assuage a desire for power or because the leadership role brings privilege and wealth. If Greenleaf's depiction of servant leaders seems a little idealistic, subsequent researchers have added a degree of practical relevance to his work by identifying correlations between servant leadership and leadership success in certain organizational contexts (Spears, 2002).

The challenge of narrowly defined altruism

The association of moral probity with altruistic intent is intuitively appealing. The suggestion that leaders who care about people are likely to be driven by ethically sound agendas seems to make sense. However, as a guarantor of leadership ethicality, altruism is not entirely unproblematic. A particular difficulty is that, by focusing on the hazards
presented by egotistical leaders, we run the risk of overlooking an even greater moral hazard: that of narrowly-defined altruism. Joseph Rost articulates this concern with respect to transformational leadership, noting that

> even if ‘leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality’, there is nothing in this notion of transformational leadership that speaks to organizations and societies being raised to higher levels of motivation and morality (1991: 164).

Terry Price (2003) elaborates on this theme, suggesting that the vigour with which Bass and Steidlmeier respond to the hazards of co-optation by egotists only serves to magnify the danger of transformational leadership conflicting with wider moral considerations. For Price, Bass and Steidlmeier’s effort to discredit egotists over-emphasises the desirability of those leaders who place the interests of the group above all else. It thus understates the “peculiar cognitive challenge of leadership” (ibid: 69): that is, a pernicious, misplaced altruism. For Price, narrowly-defined altruism may present an even greater threat to the ethicality of leadership than egotism.

Arguably, the dangers of narrowly-defined altruism are embodied by two of the leaders that Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) describe as pseudo transformational leaders in order to illustrate their authentic-pseudo distinction. Saddam Hussein and Pol Pot have been demonised by the medias of those, mainly Western, nations whose political ideologies, economic agendas and cultural backgrounds differ from theirs. And both appear to have pursued human rights policies that contrast markedly to Western norms. However, it is not self-evident that these men have been driven only by egoistic self-interest or that they have pursued their brutal regimes purely out of a desire for personal aggrandisement as Bass and Steidlmeier suggest. Although the charge of egotism conveniently fits the dominant Western perception of such leaders, an equally plausible interpretation is that they were, in fact, driven by a single-minded desire to do what they considered best for the people that they led and to impose the political ideologies in which they believed. Thus, they may be authentic-transformational “heroes” after all.

Even Adolf Hitler, that popular stereotype of the villainous charismatic leader, may not have been driven by a desire for personal enhancement, as is often supposed, but by a mission to rejuvenate the economic and military status of Germany and restore his people to what he considered to be their rightful position of European pre-eminence (Hobsbawn, 1995; Grint, 2000). According to this interpretation, Hitler’s vision of redemption for the
German nation, unacceptable though it is to most detached observers, was not the agenda of a narcissistic egotist. It was the vision of a man who believed so strongly in the ideals and values that underpinned his political ideology that he was prepared to place them above all other moral considerations in initiating acts of barbarous atrocity. For Bass and Steidlmeier, a measure of authenticity in transformational leadership is that leaders have a “strong attachment to their organization and its people” (1999: 187) and that they are “inwardly and outwardly concerned about the good that can be achieved for the group, organization or society for which they feel responsible” (ibid: 188). If we accede to Price’s (2003) reservations, this “strong attachment” and “inward and outward concern” may serve to cloud the moral perspicacity of leaders and followers alike, leading to a collective abnegation of any broader moral considerations.

In responding to this particular challenge, leadership theorists have pursued two contrasting approaches. The first approach, which is articulated notably by Bass and Steidlmeier, is to put faith in the ethical character and moral perspicacity of the leader. Thus, in order to demonstrate the moral purity of transformational leadership, Bass and Steidlmeier undertake a tour of Western ethical perspectives, pointing out how the values embodied in authentic transformational leaders lie easily with Confucian and Socratic thought, Judaeo-Christian tradition and the “modern ethical Western ethical agenda of individual liberty, utilitarian social choice, and distributive justice” (1999: 193).

As far as the ethicality of ends is concerned, Bass and Steidlmeier compare the role of the transformational leader to that of the moral sage who figures in Socratic and Confucian philosophy. Their understanding of a moral sage is of an exceptional individual who has a clear personal understanding of moral truth and who is able to share that understanding with followers. Notably, there is little space for followers to participate in the definition of moral truth. Although Bass and Steidlmeier regard the activities of such moral sages as “no individualist project— it occurs both within and for a fiduciary community” (ibid: 196), it is clear that the communal quality of moral truth lies not in the nature of its derivation but in the constitution of its beneficiaries. Moral truth is not defined through participative processes; it is unilaterally defined by morally sagacious leaders. Its apprehension is not a social accomplishment; it is the solo achievement of exceptionally gifted visionaries who decide what is best for the rest of us. Bass and Steidlmeier go on to trace the impact of the Socratic notion of the moral sage on the Judaic/Christian tradition, where “the moral sage (saint/holy person) exercises a transforming influence upon those s/he contacts” (ibid: 196). Again their understanding is one of leaders blessed with exceptional moral insight who are
able to share their personally defined moral understanding with their followers: thus “the true transformational leader is to be, in Confucian terms’ a ‘superior person’” (ibid: 196).

An alternative approach, which places a less onerous burden on the leader’s moral judgement, is to trust in the desirability of outcomes that are reached through consultative processes; processes which it is the task of the leader to facilitate and mediate. If effective leaders are those who involve others in the definition of organizational agendas, then moral sagacity on the part of those leaders is less important: the burden of moral legitimisation is shared with followers. This approach is apparent in descriptions of so called “feminine” leadership style (Hegelson, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Marshall, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995), which emphasise the role played by consultation. These accounts focus on the importance of participation, power-sharing, information-sharing, listening skills and open communication to leadership effectiveness, thus reducing the weight of dependency on the moral perspicacity of leaders. The early behavioural theories (e.g. Lewin, 1939) are also redolent of shared decision-making which shifts the moral onus away from the leader’s unilateral judgement. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe’s (2001, 2004, 2005) descriptions of transformational leadership also indicate that a willingness to consult is positively correlated with leadership effectiveness.

To summarise so far, some theorists suggest that we can identify moral leaders by their altruistic intent. They suggest that the leaders who are most likely to lead in morally reprehensible directions are those who are egotistically inclined. Therefore, by identifying the nature of the leader’s intent, in accordance with the check list supplied by the theorist, we can assure ourselves of the moral probity of their agenda. Other theorists note an intrinsically altruistic dimension to leadership; they suggest that leaders, if they are to be effective at all, need to be altruistically motivated. However, this focus on altruism in both sets of researchers sets up another potential concern: this is that leaders’ altruistic devotion to the members of the organizations they lead may blind them to broader moral considerations. Again, two alternative responses are offered to this challenge. The first is to trust in the moral perspicacity of the leader; to cast the leader as moral sage. An alternative response is to note that the most effective leaders tend to adopt a consultative approach and to take reassurance in the moral probity of the outcomes that are likely to emanate from consultative processes.
The Suppression of Agency

A second moral concern with leadership is that the asymmetrical nature of the leader-follower relationship is inherently suppressive of the agency of the latter. A great deal of the theory starts from what might be termed an “impositional” presupposition about leadership. In other words, the theory takes it for granted that leadership necessarily involves imposition of the will of the leader over the will of his or her followers. Regardless of the concerns already discussed about the moral probity of the agenda that is thus imposed upon followers, there seems to be something intrinsically disconcerting about this suppression of agency.

Some commentators note the tendency of leadership research itself to exacerbate this troubling state of affairs. Indeed, it has been suggested that the neat, dualistic categorisation of “leaders” and “followers” upon which much of the research is premised is no more than a self-reinforcing myth that induces dependency upon the former and suppresses the agency of the latter (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992). A glance at some of the definitions of leadership offered by researchers lends credence to this view. For example, Joanne Ciulla, drawing upon Rost (1991), includes the following in her review of some of the definitions offered during the last eighty years: “the ability to impress the will of the leader over those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation” (Moore, 1927, cited in Ciulla, 1998b: 11); “a process in which the activities of many are organised to move in a specific direction by one” (Bogardus, 1934, ibid); “acts by a person that influence others in a shared direction” (Seeman, 1960, ibid); “to inspire others to undertake some form of purposeful action that is determined by the leader” (Sarkasian, 1979, ibid). A monocratic tone is equally apparent in the recurrence of traits such as “masculinity”, “dominance”, “extroversion” and “self-confidence” in the lists of qualities frequently attributed to successful leaders (Northouse, 2001).

The term charisma, which conjures up visions of exceptionally gifted individuals rallying support for their personally-defined agendas, is particularly laden with impositional overtones. Max Weber offers a seminal definition of charisma. Contrasting it to rational and traditional forms of authority, he describes charismatic authority as “resting on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed by him” (1947 [1924]: 328).

Some commentators (e.g. Birnbaum 1992; Drucker 1996; Solomon 1998) have expressed concerns about the idea of charisma as evoking images of indefinable personal magnetism
and specifically reject its legitimacy within leadership theory. Nevertheless, its allure is pervasive in popular descriptions of leadership and a great deal of attention has been devoted to defining precisely what it is that enables certain individuals to possess this highly prized quality. R.J. House (1976), for example, identifies the attribution of charisma with high levels of self-confidence, dominance, a strong sense of the moral righteousness of one's beliefs and a desire to influence others. Some commentators explicitly alert us to the potentially autocratic quality of charisma: Conger and Kanungo warn of an “overpowering sense of self-importance and a strong need to be the centre of attention (which) can lead charismatic leaders to ignore the viewpoints of others and the development of leadership ability in others” (1998: 211-212). Meanwhile, Alan Bryman (1992) observes that charismatic leaders’ arrogance about their special abilities can lead to obsession, or that they may become autocratic and unwilling to heed the advice of others.

An impositional understanding of leadership even intrudes into those research agendas that reveal a less positivist tone, as in Keith Grint’s description of leaders as seeking to impose their own version of reality over and above alternatives: “the only essential element of identities [is] that they are essentially contested, and that contestation is the context within which leaders vie to impose their own version of identity upon populations” (2000: 9). Smircich and Morgan (1982) articulate concern about the totalising proclivity of leadership when they warn of a tacit recognition of the right of the leader to shape reality on behalf of the group. They point out that this right is often accorded in conditions of power imbalance which inhibit challenges to its legitimacy, since attributed rights and obligations on the part of leaders are commonly the outcome of pre-existing organizational power structures. Smircich and Morgan concede that this right is not always unanimously recognised. They allude to tensions whereby alternative understandings of reality are offered by other organizational members. However, such alternative definitions of meaning are offered within a power structure that is fundamentally unbalanced: meaning is therefore “shaped in important ways by the power relations embedded in the situation as a whole” (Smircich and Morgan, 1982: 270).

**Sensitivity to the aspirations and needs of followers**

In contrast to these visions of leadership as an essentially impositional undertaking, many theorists suggest that successful leadership requires an adaptive response to the needs of followers. A notable characteristic of such findings is their congruence with *human relations* approaches to management and organization. The human relations movement (e.g. Mayo, 1997 [1949]) drew attention to the limitations of *scientific management* (Taylor,
1997 [1012]) in achieving managerial effectiveness. In the same way, *behavioural* and *style* leadership theories illuminate the limitations of a leadership approach that focuses uniquely on task achievement, drawing attention to the importance of sensitivity to human needs. For example studies carried out by the University of Ohio (Hemphill and Coons, 1957) stressed that effective leaders need to show *consideration* to employees’ needs as well as *initiating structure*. Later, the Michigan University study (Lickert, 1970) drew attention to the importance of *employee-centred* as well as *job-centred* leadership behaviours, while Robert Blake and Jane Morton (1985) describe successful leadership behaviour in terms of *concern for people* as well as *concern for results*.

The human relations theme continues to figure prominently in more recent leadership research. For example, the gender-related perspectives already referred to (e.g. Johnson, 1976; Hegelson, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Marshall, 1995) identify a feminine leadership style that is consultative, participative and empathic, contrasting with the adversarial, competitive and aggressive tone of traditional masculine approaches. Similarly, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) advocate a transformational leadership style that values individuals, that promotes well-being and personal development, that empowers and delegates and that is accessible, approachable and in-touch with followers. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe also note that successful transformational leaders - according to their depiction of transformation, which is somewhat different from that of Bernard Bass and his colleagues - are inclined to share power with followers rather than pursuing what they refer to as “grace and favour power relationship[s]” (2005: 59).

More common than a straightforward advocacy of ministration to the needs and aspirations of followers are what Keith Grint (2000) refers to as *situational* prescriptions. Situational theories point to the efficacy of different leadership behaviours in different circumstances. For example, Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (1982) propose that leadership style should be adapted in response to the *favourability* of leadership situations while Fred Fiedler (1967) suggests that different stages of *task-readiness* amongst followers call for different mixes of relationship-building and task-orientation. Calls for an *androgy nous* leadership style, which combines characteristically masculine and feminine traits (Grant, 1992; Syrett and Hogg, 1992), also valorise an apposite blend of imposition and facilitation.

A troubling aspect of these relationship-oriented and situational theories is their potentially manipulative implications: if leaders switch on and off their responsiveness to followers’ needs, aspirations and interests as circumstances dictate then, while they may not necessarily suppress agency, they at least seem to be harnessing it to their own agenda.
Human relationships between leaders and followers, instead of being rooted in emotional responses, are thus colonised by considerations of rational accounting. Apart from the intrinsically discomfiting nature of such instrumental co-optation of emotions, this may also increase followers’ vulnerability: followers may be tempted to place trust in leaders as a consequence of the latter’s apparent concern for their wellbeing, only to find their interests sacrificed to the leader’s agenda when contingently opposite. For this reason, an unequivocally transactional, task-focussed relationship may seem morally preferable to the apparent, but conditional, kindness of relationship-sensitive, transformational and other “new paradigm” (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2004) leaders. Although the former do not carry the warm glow of inclusion which surrounds the latter, they at least offer the virtues of transparency and consistency.

According to some commentators, we should not be overly concerned about the manipulative potential of situational theories. For example, Abraham Zalesnic (1977) suggests that successful leaders are highly unlikely to dissemble. Proposing that genuineness is one of the defining qualities of leadership, Zalesnic paints a picture of leaders who say what they believe, who stand by their principles and who can be relied upon to support those with whom they have built a relationship of trust. However, it is not clear whether, in his differentiation of leaders from managers, Zalesnic is painting an aspirational picture of how he would like leaders to behave or whether he is presenting anecdotal research findings concerning the way in which effective leaders actually do behave.

In contrast with Zalesnic, other commentators warn of the dangers of dissembling. For example, Beverley Alimo-Metcalf notes that, while the concept of empowerment, “clothed as it is in the warmth of humanistic language”, is a seductive one, in practice it is an approach often pursued by managers with “reputations for favouring a management style more akin to Machiavelli than to the public image of Mother Teresa” (1995: 6). On a similar note, reflecting on the superficial way in which feminine values are often adopted in organizations, Judi Marshall suggests that:

the language used seems to herald a revaluing and integration of “female” values. But this may be a co-option, a token effort leaving the dominant base of values largely unreformed. The transformative potential of new approaches is seriously undermined if they are used for instrumental purposes or within frameworks of competitive advantage (Marshall, 1995: 101).
Mayumi Mori articulates a similar concern, observing that, in a world whose social structures are dominated by “Western, white male, left brain thinking patterns and approaches...we need to be going lower, deeper and wider as well as faster and higher” (2002: 229). The moral hazard, then, is that relationship-oriented leadership behaviours will be co-opted by those who regard them, not as a means for organizational leaders to address “lower, deeper and wider” human concerns, but purely as an instrumental tool for getting “faster and higher”.

Conflict between the collective and the individual

Even if we overlook the concern that an apparently people-focussed approach to leadership might be used as a manipulative tool, there is a further troubling tone in some of the leadership models considered so far. This is the emphasis that they place on building a collective purpose and on establishing fealty to a shared vision. While this focus on the collective may assuage concerns about monocratic imposition of the leader’s agenda, it also raises an alternative challenge to agency. This is the challenge that the collective will may present to individual agency.

The emphasis on building shared purpose is particularly evident in some transformational leadership theories. For example, James MacGregor Burns (1978, 2003) suggests that herein lies “transforming” [or transformational] leadership’s moral purpose. According to Burns transforming leadership is characterised by the leader’s ability to encourage followers to subordinate their individual needs and wants to a collective agenda. In a appeal to the essentially uplifting qualities of participation in a Durkheimian-style common conscience (Morrison, 1995), Burns suggests that it is only through participation in a shared mission that people satisfy their “higher order” needs and thus find true self-actualisation. Therefore, in facilitating fealty to a collective agenda, transforming leaders enable followers to rise above their illusory wants and thus evoke agency on a more elevated level. Burns therefore calls upon transforming leaders not only to move followers vertically up a Maslow-type needs hierarchy but also to move them horizontally towards an appreciation of the essentially social nature of their “higher order” needs:

The process is ‘vertical’ as individuals are motivated to higher and higher levels of want and hope and ambition and demand. There is an equally important “horizontal” dimension as these spiralling motives of individuals interact, creating integrated structures of collective motivation (2003: 151).
Bernard Bass (1985, 1990, 1998a) and Bruce Avolio (1994) follow Burns in focusing on the need to transcend individualised, transactional exchanges by building a shared sense of purpose. They also suggest that the moral dimension of transformational leadership lies in its capacity to divert attention from the individual to the collective:

Leaders are truly transformational when they increase awareness of what is right, good, important and beautiful; when they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualisation; when they foster in followers higher moral maturity; and when they move followers to go beyond their self interests for the good of their group, organization or society (Bass, 1998a: 171).

Some researchers who are critical of the more positivist contributions to leadership research also highlight our tendency to think about leaders as creators of shared understanding. Thus Smircich and Morgan (1982) draw on Weick's (1995) interpretation of reality as a shared cognitive map to highlight the role of leadership in defining followers' understanding of reality. Keith Grint (2000) also emphasises how effective leadership can overcome divergent self-identities to generate group-identity and a shared understanding of present, past and future.

Michael Keeley (1998) articulates the moral challenge to agency that is presented by this emphasis on building commitment to a shared agenda. Keeley's criticism is directed particularly at Bass's transformational leadership theory, but his comments are also apposite to other perspectives that focus on the creation of collective purpose. Keeley points out that the efficacy of self-actualisation as an ethical justification for transformational leadership rests upon the questionable assumption of homogeneity of followers' interests, values and aspirations. Keeley questions this premise, concluding that transformational leadership presents an insidious version of majority rule, in which peer pressure is placed upon all followers to support the common vision generated by the leader regardless of its congruence with individual agendas. Under the thrall of transformational leadership, minority groups and individuals will thus be subjected to subtle coercion to conform and "unless leaders are able to transform everyone and create absolute unanimity of interests (a very special case), transformational leadership merely produces a majority will that represents the interests of the strongest faction" (1998: 124).

In responding to the challenge presented by the collective to the individual, different researchers adopt contrasting approaches. The first approach echoes Alan Fox's (1966) depiction of a unitarist frame of reference. Fox used this term to describe the supposition
that the real interests of organizational members are in harmony; that apparent conflicts of interest are the result of misunderstanding, poor coordination or misbehaviour by deviant individuals; and that disagreements can be resolved by the application of remedial conflict-resolution techniques. Leadership theorists who present a unitarist understanding suggest that apparent tensions amongst followers or between individuals and the collective should be resolved in favour of the latter by morally sagacious and socially influential leaders. Unsurprisingly, this stance is articulated most explicitly by Bass in his direct defence against Keeley’s (1998) challenge. Bass (1998a) suggests that transformational leaders must attend to both transactional and transformational dimensions, so that transactional checks and balances will ensure adequate representation of individual interests while the transformational elements build commitment to the common purpose. Bass downplays the likelihood of tension between those transactional and transformational dimensions, implying that the real interests of followers lie on the transformational side. The task of transformational leaders is therefore to make followers aware of these real interests and, using their exceptional leadership capabilities, to build commitment to the shared purposes through which those real interests can be realised.

An alternative response to the potential for moral tension between the individual and the organization also echoes the work of Fox (1966), this time recalling his description of the pluralist frame of reference: that organizations are collections of separate groups, each with its unique needs and interests, and that a certain amount of conflict is inevitable as each group seeks to meet its own needs and pursue its own interests. This second approach acknowledges plurality of interests, aspirations, values and perspectives, not only in relation to sub-groups within the leader’s domain of influence but also on an individual level. It thus accentuates the need for leaders to respond to this heterogeneity amongst groups and individuals in order to succeed. Whereas Bass’s discussion of transformational leadership leans heavily towards the unitarist perspective, the alternative transformational leadership model offered by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe shows greater sympathy for pluralism, highlighting the congruence between effective leadership and respect for diversity. Thus Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe’s (2005) contend that “the constructs of leadership emerging from our data also place great importance on being sensitive to the agenda of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, rather than seeking to meet the agenda of only one interest group” (2005: 63). Sensitivity to pluralism is also apparent in the distinction that Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe draw between their networking and achieving factor and Bass’s inspirational charismatic dimension: the former includes a “crucially important additional aspect, which is ‘sensitivity to the agenda of different key players/interest groups, such that they feel they are being served by the vision’” (2005: 58).
This pluralistically-responsive perspective is also apparent in Smircich and Morgan’s call for leadership researchers to pay greater attention to “the processes through which the management of meaning in organised situations can develop in ways that enhance, rather than deny, the ability of individuals to take responsibility for the definition and control of their world” (1982: 271). The message underpinning Smircich and Morgan’s invocation is that leaders need not be viewed either as unilateral shapers of meaning or enforcers of fealty to a shared meaning. Rather, they can be regarded as facilitators of a process in which, rather than surrendering their sensemaking autonomy to leaders, organizational members are encouraged to make sense for themselves and to negotiate, in contexts that are not distorted by hierarchical power structures, their own understanding of reality.

I will now briefly summarise this discussion of the challenge which leadership presents to agency before drawing some general conclusions from my overview of the leadership literature. Many researchers find that the capacity to respond to the needs of individuals is an important ingredient to effective leadership: although leaders may sometimes need to adopt an autocratic approach, they must also take account of the needs of the individuals who they lead. On the one hand, leaders might thus be encouraged to make space for the needs and aspirations of followers; a leadership imperative that may be expected to promote, rather than suppress agency in the latter. On the other hand, the contingent nature of follower-responsive leadership prescriptions gives them a Machiavellian undertone: the call for leaders to adopt an expedient mix of task-focused and relationship-focused behaviours may be interpreted as a prescription for dissembling manipulation on their part. Indeed, some commentators express particular concern about the consequences of leaders being encouraged to adopt behaviours which do not reflect their underpinning values. Even if concerns about the calculating instrumentality of situational leadership prescriptions are set aside, a further challenge to individual agency is presented by the valorisation of the collective that defines a lot of leadership theory. Some commentators counter this challenge by proposing that it is only through participation in a collective undertaking that individuals realise their “true” interests. According to this perspective, its capacity to build commitment to a shared vision gives leadership an intrinsically moral quality. Other commentators express greater sympathy for heterogeneity and call upon leaders to respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of different groups and individuals. An understanding thus emerges of the leader as a facilitator of agency, rather than as an imposer of personally-defined or collective agendas.
Locating the Leadership Literature and Some Concluding Comments

In this review, I have drawn on the leadership literature in order to explore some moral challenges associated with leadership. Although the literature is primarily focused on identifying the ingredients of effective leadership, it nevertheless offers a starting point from which these moral challenges can be explored. Some theorists offer an explicit defence to these challenges; other researchers do not explicitly consider the moral dimension of leadership but the recipes for effectiveness which they offer include the basic materials from which such a defence might be constructed. In discussing these responses, I may have given the impression that whatever a leader does is open to moral critique. My review of the literature might therefore be interpreted as a destructive undertaking; a demonstration that leadership cannot be moral. However, this is not my intention. At this stage, I am assuming that leadership has the capacity to be morally commendable as well as morally degenerate. My quest is to establish a basis from which such differentiation might be made.

It is clear that avoiding the arrows of moral critique is not a straightforward matter. This is primarily because those arrows may be loosed from many different directions. Therefore, responses which propose simple defences against moral critique are unlikely to stand up to anything but the most superficial interrogation. For this reason, some of the more explicit responses that I have discussed above seem to be particularly unsatisfactory. The complexity of the issue precludes simple, straightforward recipes for moral legitimacy. A credible template for moral leadership which offers simple, unequivocal rules for action is therefore likely to be elusive. A credible template is more likely to comprise a complex of imperatives, issues and points for consideration that might be used to assist reflection on the moral legitimacy of specific leadership interventions. This review of the leadership literature has enabled some preliminary observations concerning the content of such a template. I will summarise these observations. I will then reflect on the contrasting nature of different leadership commentators’ stances in relation to these observations, relating these stances to broader perspectives within management and organization theory.

The first observation concerning the ethicality of leadership is that altruistic intent lends to leadership a certain amount of intuitive moral credibility. It is far easier to mount a moral defence for a leader who is altruistically motivated than it would be for one who is primarily driven by personal interest. However, to differentiate between moral and immoral leadership purely on the basis of altruism and egoism seems inadequate. Such a basis of
evaluation overlooks the potential hazards of unmitigated commitment to the interests of a narrowly defined group. An unqualified and non-reflective preoccupation with the wellbeing and aspirations of the group which falls under the leader's patronage thus seems an incomplete prescription for moral leadership. Although, to a certain extent, altruism might be considered "good" and egotism "bad", the moral allure of altruism in leaders is at least partly dependent on their ability and willingness to consider the implications of their actions in relation to the wider world. Reflection on these broader ramifications clearly requires breadth of vision and moral perspicacity.

A second observation is that moral leadership calls for sensitivity to the vexations associated with imposition. In particular, it is apparent that an overly autocratic leadership approach may undermine the agency of so-called followers. Responsiveness to the personal and group needs of followers may help to avoid the hazard of imposition. Such responsiveness also lends to leadership an intuitive moral appeal. However, this allure is undermined if the leader's apparent concern for people is driven purely by expediency. In order to be morally sustainable, it seems reasonable to expect people-related leadership behaviour to be applied consistently. Its moral sustainability is also enhanced if leaders' people-related behaviour is congruent with their underpinning values, for this offers at least some assurance that it will be manifested with a degree of constancy.

The ability of leaders to build commitment to a shared agenda is also ethically attractive. There seems to be something intrinsically uplifting about setting aside individual agendas and participating in a collective undertaking. However, in rallying support for a shared agenda, leaders need to be sensitive to the challenge presented by the collective to the individual: the moral allure of participation in a common vision is tarnished if it is erosive of individual agency.

In reviewing leadership commentators' responses to issues such as these, it is possible to distinguish contrasting stances. These stances are readily apparent in explicit ethical discussions of the moral challenges presented by leadership. They also simmer at a more tacit level throughout various prescriptions for effectiveness. The tone that echoes most stridently through the commentaries is that of a managerialist (Burnham, 1972 [1945];

3 Using the term "managerialist" here is potentially confusing, given the distinction drawn by some commentators between leadership and management (e.g. Zalesnic, 1977; Kotter, 1990). These commentators tend to present a laudatory picture of leadership, contrasting it to a somewhat pejorative depiction of management. It is even more confusing that some of the most "managerialist" recipes for leadership effectiveness either adopt this leader-manager distinction or, as in the case of Bernard Bass and his associates, prescribe a transformational leadership model that is congruent...
Enteman, 1993) discourse. The key premise of managerialism has been concisely summarised by Tony Watson as:

“a belief that modern societies, and the institutions within them, should be run by qualified managers who can organise society rationally on the basis of expert knowledge – thus replacing the divisiveness and inefficiency of debate and democracy” (Watson, 2002: 53).

The faith in leaders’ moral sagacity that characterises some of the accounts described in this chapter sits comfortably within this managerialist perspective. These accounts take for granted that those who occupy formal leadership roles are innately better placed than those who occupy less exalted hierarchical levels to make decisions that affect the rest of us. Such is their confidence in the proficiency of senior managers that this presumption of expertise extends even to the apprehension of moral probity. The application of managerialism within the realm of ethics is thus accorded normative legitimacy.

The emphasis that charismatic and transformational theorists place on altruism as an indicator of moral probity is evocative of managerialism’s trust in those who sit atop organizations. This onus on leaders’ altruistic intent implies that, so long as the distractions of self-interest can be overcome, leaders’ moral perspicacity will ensure ethically legitimate outcomes. If the apprehension of moral probity is a challenging undertaking for the rest of us, we can entrust this awesome responsibility to our leaders, safe in the knowledge that their superior aptitude sanctions such a role.

A managerialist tone is also apparent in the presumption that skilled, transformational leaders will navigate a pathway between transformation and transaction, thus synthesising collective agendas with individual agency in such a way that evaporates tensions between the two. Managerialism also infuses some of the responses to the impositional implications of leadership described above. It is particularly evident in the assumption that successful leaders will choose an appropriate balance of task and relationship oriented behaviours, only resorting to outright imposition when necessitated by the common interest. An iconic, managerialist vision is thus presented of warmly paternalistic and morally sagacious senior managers, equipped with social influencing skills and technical expertise, ushering organizations towards a better future.

with it. Nevertheless, it is, I believe, elucidatory to use this term in relation to the broader context of management and organization studies.
That managerialism permeates a great deal of leadership theory should come as no surprise given the primarily functionalist nature of the latter. As I have already pointed out, the overwhelming preoccupation of leadership theorists has been to uncover the secrets of leadership success. This agenda is generally undertaken in the interests of enhanced management. It presupposes that managers will be better placed to manage if they can learn to lead effectively. The right of leaders, or managers, to lead is rarely questioned. In most leadership commentaries, that those who occupy formal positions of authority will dispense their responsibilities in the common interest is either taken as a given or is not subjected to critique. Nevertheless, despite this preponderance of managerialism, a more critical tone can be detected in the accounts of some leadership commentators.

I use the epithet “critical” with caution, given the multiple meanings attributed to it in relation to management studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Watson, 2001; Parker 2002). I am using it here in the sense articulated by Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott when they appeal for:

a qualitatively different form of management: one that is more democratically accountable to those whose lives are affected in so many ways by management decisions, ... [where] ... activities are determined through processes of decision making that take more direct account of the will and priorities of a majority of employees, consumers and citizens – rather than being dependent on the inclinations of an elite of self-styled experts whose principle allegiance is either to themselves or to their masters (1996: 40).

Martin Parker, in arguing Against Management, articulates a clear challenge to what he refers to as the “imperialism of management” (2002: 11). Parker proposes that, not only is managerialism not the sole way in which contemporary organizations might be structured; it is also far from clear that it is the best way. In challenging the presuppositions of managerialism, with its veneration of hierarchical prerogative, Parker draws attention to a range of media that express dissatisfaction with it. He also calls for enquiry into alternative forms of co-ordination that may better attend to the interests of those constituencies that organizations are presumed to serve. While he does not imprecate against the notion of organization per-se, Parker rails against a historically specific construction of the manager and the managed, against the vastly unequal distribution of rights and responsibilities that now seems to follow in lockstep from this originary distinction between those who rule and those who are ruled (2002: 210).
Some of the commentaries that I have reviewed in this chapter are explicitly critical in the sense described by Alvesson and Willmott. They might also be interpreted as offering critiques of leadership that are consistent with Parker's appeal for enquiry into alternative ways of coordinating peoples' activities. Falling into this category of overt critique is Smirchich and Morgan's (1982) warning that distorted power structures within organizations will act to privilege leaders' versions of reality over discrepant versions. Likewise, Price's (2003) and Keeley's (1998) critiques of the ethicality of Bass's transformational leadership model constitute a direct challenge to Bass's managerialist presuppositions. Price's disquiet with Bass's overemphasis on leaders' altruistic care for their followers is that it deflects attention from the broader social and environmental consequences of organizational activities. Keeley's concern is that Bass's emphasis on a collective agenda overlooks the inevitable heterogeneity of followers' interests and aspirations. Both Price's focus on extra-organizational affect and Keeley's emphasis on pluralism strike a characteristically critical note.

An overtly critical tone is also apparent in Marshall (1995) and Mori's (2002) admonition that situational and supposedly human relations-oriented leadership prescriptions may be harnessed to the wheel of corporate productivity with little genuine regard for the agendas of followers. Marshal and Mori's critique echo Alvesson and Willmott's critical allusion to "the velvet language of humanism and employee involvement" (1996: 98-99), which "serve[s] to advance and legitimise an expansion of systems of management control that aspire to infiltrate the hearts and minds of employees" (ibid: 34).

Other commentators display critical sympathies whilst offering a less overt challenge to functionalist managerialism. Indeed, some are as eager to discover and share with management the secrets of leadership success as are their more candidly managerialist colleagues. Nevertheless, some of the conclusions drawn by the former are closer to the critical criteria proposed by the likes of Alvesson, Willmott and Parker than they are to managerialism's wholehearted obeisance to management expertise in all matters. Thus, those theorists who draw attention to the instrumental effectiveness of consultative behaviours and those who stress the benefits of meeting the diverse needs of a heterogeneous population of followers, while not of an explicitly "critical" persuasion, are at least on its wavelength. Those theorists who advocate feminine-style leadership behaviours might qualify for this category, as might Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe's (2001; 2004; 2005) accounts of transformational leadership.
Now to suggest that some of the leadership accounts that I have reviewed in this chapter are broadly managerialist and that others display a critical demeanour is not to propose a precise, dualistic distinction into which each perspective can be placed. "Managerialist" and "critical" are not clearly delineated and mutually exclusive bins into which leadership theories can be sorted. These descriptions are better understood as loose bundles of characteristics that can be attributed in varying degrees to each commentary. One of the benefits of labelling them as I have done is that this may help to orient them within the broader field of organization and management studies. This exercise in orientation, in turn, may facilitate later reflection on the ramifications of different approaches to the ethical evaluation of leadership.

A further benefit of this loose categorisation is that classifying theories as either managerialist or critically-inclined helps to draw attention to some difficulties that relate to each respective group. The chief difficulties associated with the more managerialist accounts concern the expectation of unilateralism that they place upon leaders: to a large extent, these accounts put the gavel of moral legitimisation firmly in the hands of leaders. This asks an awful lot of those leaders, for ethics is rarely a simple matter. Reflection on the ethical ramifications of leadership decisions is a complex undertaking, requiring breadth of vision and moral perspicacity. It seems unreasonable to expect leaders to undertake such processes of moral reflection single-handedly. Possession of the social influencing skills that enable effective leadership, along with whatever additional technical and practical skills may be demanded of specific leadership roles, is no guarantee that a leader will also be endowed with the moral sagacity required to legitimise unilateral, moral decision-making. Given the complexity of moral decision-making, its quality will surely be enhanced by contributions from diverse perspectives. Managerialism is broadly inimical to such breadth, leaving leaders to shoulder the burden of moral arbitration alone.

The focus that the more managerialist versions place on building commitment to a shared vision is also potentially problematic. Although the interests and aspirations of individuals are likely to share some common ground with those of the group, there are also likely to be points of tension. Sensitivity to individual difference will enhance a leader's ability to respond to that tension. To some extent, leaders themselves can take individual differences into account whilst developing and implementing a group agenda. However, while paternalistic respect for plurality is laudable, the active involvement of individuals in the establishment of a collective agenda is likely to enable a more accurate representation of individual difference. Again, the managerialist accounts of leadership do not generally
encourage such involvement except insofar as it will make people feel better about supporting the “common” vision that has been defined by the leader.

But if the unilateralism of managerialist accounts places upon leaders an unreasonable burden of moral sagacity, critically tinged commentaries present their own characteristic difficulties. Managerialist expectations of leaders entail a limitation of scope that is potentially damaging for ethical legitimacy. The difficulties with the critical accounts of leadership, on the other hand, are more concerned with the practicalities of organizational life. If leaders adopt the responses to the moral challenges of leadership that are proposed by critically-inclined theorists, there is a danger that they will not be perceived to be leading. Leaders are generally expected, after all, to take the lead. Notwithstanding Parker’s (2002) description of the critical undercurrents that suffuse a range of cultural arenas, managerialist expectations of imposition seem to be deeply embedded in popular understanding of leadership. Despite managerialism’s faults, its pervasive influence is hard to avoid. As Parker himself puts it, “the particular vision of managerialism that has been constructed over the past century is deeply implicated in a wide variety of political and ethical problems” (2002: 11). Nevertheless, so deeply engrained is it that it “limits our capacity to imagine alternative forms of organising” (ibid). As a consequence of the predicament that Parker describes, leaders who respond to the inevitable limitations of their own purview by sharing the burden of ethical reflection are likely to be perceived as shirking the responsibilities that accompany their elevated status and privileged remuneration: they are paid to lead; therefore they must lead.

A further difficulty with the more consultative accounts of leadership concerns the time-bounded nature of organizational life. People who occupy leadership roles are expected to make decisions with a minimum of delay so that others can get on with implementing those decisions. Consultation, on the other hand, can be a lengthy process. As the majority of the literature indicates, we tend to look for qualities such as decisiveness, self-assurance, determination and resoluteness in our leaders. Enhancement of the moral legitimacy of their decision-making through the facilitation of consultative processes will be of little comfort to leaders who lose their jobs for pussyfooting. In view of these tensions, those models of leadership which place an onus on unilateral pronouncement by the leader may be more supportive of career enhancement than those which stress the ethically legitimating force of consultation.

In addition to the preliminary observations that I have made above, then, an important question emerges from this exploration of the leadership literature. That question concerns
the extent to which the managerialist expectations of leadership that dominate the literature leave space for the type of consultative engagement that may enhance the ethical legitimacy of leadership. Or to put it another way, it concerns the extent that ethically legitimising, consultative forms can be reconciled with the impositional unilateralism that permeates most theoretical and practitioner expectations of leadership.

It is important to clarify the nature of the preliminary observations that I have made in this chapter. Firstly, they have been adduced from a review of leadership research that is empirically validated by a variety of methodologies that range from the positivist to the interpretive, with an overwhelming tendency towards the former. I have sought to avoid those popularist prescriptions for successful leadership that are intuitively rather than empirically derived, avoiding, in particular, what Alvesson and Willmott refer to as the “self-celebratory books penned by heroic senior executives” (1996: 210).

Secondly, since the focus of this research has been on describing, analysing and offering recipes for effectiveness, the discussion of morality that it contains is largely devoid of theoretical philosophical content. These observations, then, have been drawn from mainly empirical research that is not overly concerned with the moral implications of leadership and any moral consideration that it includes lacks rigorous reference to the philosophical ethics literature. My intention now is to augment this foundation in two respects. Firstly, the next section will examine leadership through the lens of the philosophical ethics literature. Just as the present chapter has explored what leadership theorists have to say to ethics, the next three chapters ask what the ethical theorists have to say to leadership. These chapters will outline some of the most widely discussed moral philosophical theories, grouping these under the three meta-ethical headings of principle-based ethics, existentialist ethics and intersubjective ethics. After outlining some prominent contributions to each of these meta-ethical perspectives, I will elaborate on the implications of that each holds for leadership.

My exploration of the ethics literature will be followed by, but also partly guided by, empirical research. Since the majority of empirical research concerning leadership has not explicitly considered its ethical ramifications, I will make my own contribution to alleviating this deficit by conducting empirical research that enquires specifically into the relationship between morality and leadership. The findings of this research will be presented in the three chapters which comprise my empirical report.

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Although, in the presentation of this thesis, the chapters that comprise my empirical report stand apart from the chapters that discuss moral philosophy, the structure and content of the latter is partly shaped by the findings of my empirical research.
3.0 ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

Introduction

In the following three chapters I will outline some different ways of thinking about morality and explore the implications that these different approaches have for the relationship between morality and leadership. To simplify this undertaking, I propose to group the approaches to morality under the headings of three meta-ethical perspectives and focus on those theories within each group which have received the most attention in the Western philosophical tradition. The first group comprises those theories which understand morality in relation to principles that are held to be universally valid. The second group considers morality as a matter of individual definition. Within this group I will focus specifically on existentialist theory. The third group understands morality as an intersubjective achievement.

The theories that I have chosen to include in these chapters do not exhaust the ethical perspectives from which leadership might be considered. However, it is necessary to limit this review in some way and I have chosen these three headings as being sufficiently representative of the broad gamut of ethical theory to offer a diverse framework for exploration.

In focusing on the Western tradition I am precluding consideration of those moral philosophies from outside of that tradition. This should not be taken as an inference that alternative traditions are any less valid than Western philosophy or that they could not offer a useful basis for considering the challenges presented by leadership in contemporary British organizations. My reasons for focusing on the Western tradition, rather, are twofold. Firstly, it is necessary to limit, in some way, the scope of this undertaking. Secondly, the Western tradition is that with which I am most familiar and which is also easiest for a UK based researcher to access.

To apply these ethical theories to the field of moral leadership is to court the challenge of misappropriation. The theories have been developed in response to the particular philosophical preoccupations of their proponents. A comprehensive appreciation of them would therefore need to be developed with reference to those preoccupations. In most cases, those preoccupations do not include the morality of organizational leadership: Immanuel Kant, for instance, was not thinking about the CEOs of 21st century business corporations when he penned his various formulations of the categorical imperative. Therefore, to take
these theoretical offerings out of their context and apply them to that of contemporary organizational leadership runs the risk of anachronism. However, although these philosophies were not written with organizational leadership in mind, they have something to offer to that domain. Therefore, while I regret any misrepresentation that may arise from this anachronistic application, I believe this appropriation to be justified.

My treatment of each of these three meta-ethical perspectives is a little different. In the first chapter, which discusses principle-based ethics, I cover quite a lot of ground in a fairly superficial manner. This reflects the breadth of principle-based theories that shape the Anglo-American tradition of moral philosophy, a representative selection of which I have attempted to include. In order to give some consideration to each of these theories, that consideration has to be brief. I will reflect on some of the implications of these various theories for leadership as I go along. I will then draw out some general implications at the end of the chapter.

In the chapters on existentialist and intersubjectivist ethics, on the other hand, I will discuss the theories in greater detail. This is partly because of the more narrowly focussed nature of the material that I cover in these two chapters. It is also partly due to my own prior experience of these three respective meta-ethical perspectives. My own philosophical education, some thirty odd years ago, was rooted firmly within the Anglo-American tradition, which I found quite unsatisfying. I was, until recently, relatively unfamiliar with existentialist and the intersubjectivist theory, and with the virtue ethical theory that I also refer to in the chapter in intersubjectivism. Therefore, my more detailed elaboration of these perspectives is perhaps reflective of my greater and more recent interest in them.

There is a further difference between the structure of the chapters on existentialist and intersubjective theory and that on principle-based theory. This is that, whereas in the latter I have drawn out the implications for leadership as I go along, I have saved most of my reflections on the implications of existentialism and intersubjectivism for the end of their respective chapters. These contrasting structural approaches seem appropriate given the diverse range of material covered in the principle-based chapter and the more homogenous character of the material in each of the existentialist and intersubjective chapters.
3.1 PRINCIPLE-BASED ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

*Principle-based ethics theory* holds that morally right action is action which is consistent with the application of certain principles. Therefore, in order to explore the moral challenges associated with leadership we must consider them in relation to those principles. Principle-based ethics is characterised by a *universalist* commitment: the principles which define moral action are generally believed to apply universally. It also tends to be premised upon an *objectivist* moral ontology: a belief that the legitimacy of moral principles pertains irrespective of a person’s apprehension of that legitimacy. Principle-based ethics is thus contrasted to those theories which believe that morality is culturally relative or that it is a matter of subjective judgement.

Many approaches have been taken to the identification of those universal, objective principles which define moral action. Broadly speaking, these approaches can be classified in relation to the extent to which they display a *consequentialist* or a *non-consequentialist* character. Consequentialist theory judges the moral worth of action in relation to the consequences that it brings about. It focuses on the desirability of states of affairs, proposing that actions are morally right or wrong insofar as they promote or detract from those intrinsically desirable states of affairs. The manner in which these outcomes are achieved is of lesser importance in judging moral worth: consequences take primacy in moral evaluation, so the moral probity of a certain end justifies the means adopted to bring it about. Non-consequentialist theory, on the other hand, focuses on the moral worth that is intrinsic to an action. It proposes that certain types of action carry an intrinsic rightness or wrongness irrespective of the consequences that they bring about. Whereas consequentialist theory focuses on the ends of ethical action, non-consequentialist theory pays particular attention to the means adopted to bring about those ends.

In this chapter, I will describe some of the consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories that have received most attention in the Western philosophical tradition, and which are also frequently drawn on in business ethics texts. I will consider the ways in which these theories relate to the context of work organizations and explore some of their implications for leadership within that context. I will conclude by making some general observations about principle-based theory and reflecting upon some insights that it affords to the relationship between ethics and leadership.
Consequentialist Ethics and Leadership

When philosophers speak of consequentialist theory they generally refer to utilitarianism. Utilitarianism proposes that the morally right action is that which brings about the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Utilitarian analysis of leadership decisions therefore seems to be a fairly straightforward matter: the morally right action for a leader to take is that which maximises the good for the greatest number of people. The apparent simplicity of the utilitarian imperative is, however, misleading, for its use as a template for moral leadership is beset with conceptual complexity and practical difficulties.

The first difficulty is that the precise nature of the "good", which leaders must seek to maximise, needs to be defined. Jeremy Bentham's seminal formulation of utilitarian ethics defined good in terms of pleasure. Bentham premised his theory on the principle of psychological hedonism, proposing that the only thing that humans seek in its own right is pleasure and that the one thing that they avoid above all else is pain: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure" (2000 [1789]: 88). Pleasure, according to Bentham, is therefore the only categorical good: all other supposed goods, such as wealth, status, friendship, culture and achievement, are only contingently desirable insofar as they promote pleasure. Conversely, supposed evils such as poverty, rejection, dishonesty and hostility can only be bad insofar as they bring about pain; they have no categorical undesirability. Since pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the only things that people desire in their own right, Bentham argued, maximisation of pleasure must comprise the basis of moral evaluation. A Benthamite utilitarian would therefore judge the morality of leadership in relation to the amount of pleasure that it brings about. Confronted with a morally charged decision, a leader should choose that course of action which leads to the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people.

Later utilitarians have, however, taken issue with the psychological hedonism which underpins Bentham's theory, distancing themselves from its depiction of humans as "a large assembly of pleasure hogs constantly out for a buzz" (Goodin, 1993: 242). Even some commentators who agree with the principle of psychological hedonism question whether this entails ethical hedonism: it does not necessarily follow, just because pleasure is all that some people value categorically, that pleasure ought it be accorded intrinsic merit. Some critics even go so far as to propose that certain types of pleasure are intrinsically bad, such as the pleasure that some might take from witnessing a public execution (Dancy, 1993).

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5 As far as Bentham was concerned, the maximisation of pleasure should therefore serve as a criterion for legislation.
In moving away from Bentham's hedonistic foundation, utilitarians have taken various directions. The first direction is taken by what Parfit (1984) calls desire-fulfilment theorists. These place the satisfaction of people's desires, irrespective of what those desires are, at the centre of morality. A second direction, referred to by Goodin (1993) as welfare utilitarianism, places people's long-term interests, as opposed to their immediate desires, at the centre of utilitarian calculation. A further variant, which Parfit refers to as objective list theory, holds that certain things are intrinsically good or bad for a person however much that person may or may not desire those things. The objective list typically includes items such as knowledge, culture, aesthetic experience and intellectual achievement.

The moral philosophy of John Stuart Mill responds to concerns about the implications of Bentham's psychological hedonism. Mill (1962 [1861]) observes that those people who are given the opportunity, through education and experience, to experience what he refers to as "higher" forms of pleasure tend to find these higher forms inherently preferable. He thus offers a basis for reconciling hedonism with a valorisation of cultural and intellectual achievement.

Each of these variants of utilitarianism holds slightly different implications for moral leadership. Desire-fulfilment utilitarians would expect leaders to maximise the extent to which people can satisfy their desires, whatever those desires might be. Welfare utilitarians would call upon leaders to maximise long-term welfare, whether or not people desire this in the short-term. Objective list theorists would expect leaders to maximise those states which are considered to be objectively good, whether or not people desire those things and regardless of alternative conceptions of welfare. Notably, these three variants of utilitarianism would be sympathetic to varying degrees of paternalism on the part of leaders, where paternalism is understood as imposing some form of restraint on followers' freedom in order to secure their good (Kleinig, 1983). If we take desire-fulfilment utilitarianism as a basis for action, it would be hard for leaders to maximise the fulfilment of desire without first finding out what people desire. Furthermore, according to desire-fulfilment utilitarianism, leaders would have no basis upon which to disqualify the legitimacy of those desires. Welfare and objective list utilitarianism, on the other hand, have a place for paternalist leadership. Each offers some space for leaders to restrain people from satisfying their current desires on the basis that they claim to know better what is in those people's long term interests or what is objectively good for them.
A second conceptual complication with the utilitarian template for moral leadership lies in defining the *universe of moral relevance*; that is the composition of the group whose good must be taken into account in the leader's moral decision-making. For example, should it include only those people with whom the leader has direct contact; should it include all members of the organization for whom the leader has responsibility; should it extend to all people who, in some small way, may be affected by the actions of that leader? And should the universe of moral relevance only include those people who are currently alive or should future generations also be taken into account?

It would seem that, if utilitarianism is to stand alone as a basis for moral decision-making, then the universe of moral relevance can have no limits. To limit that universe would require more than a utilitarian rationale: other, non-utilitarian criteria would need to be enlisted, such as notions of duty or contractual obligation, which pertain only to that limited group. If utilitarianism is to stand alone as a principle for moral leadership, without support from non-consequentialist rationales, then its universe of moral relevance must surely embrace every person who may in some small way be affected by the decisions and actions of that leader, either currently or in the future.

But even this definition leaves unanswered the further question of whether we should limit moral consideration to humans or whether all sentient creatures, and perhaps even non-sentient beings, should be included in the universe of moral relevance. This question has a particular bearing for leaders of organizations that are involved with activities such as food production, clothing, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. However, since nearly all organizations impact to some extent on the natural environment, the indirect impact on animals and other wildlife is of potential moral significance for all leaders.

Leaders who seek to maximise good are not free of complexity even when they have reached an understanding of both the nature of good which they seek to maximise and the universe of moral relevance, for the question of distribution of good within that constituency also needs to be addressed. Should leaders aim for the greatest total good, which may justify substantial inequalities in distribution, or should they aim to raise the minimum level of good experienced by every member of the universe of moral relevance? This question is important with regard to the distribution of rewards within organizations and also the way in which products and services are priced and marketed. Furthermore, is a considerable reduction of the good experienced by a few members of the universe of moral relevance justified by small increases in the good experienced by a far larger number? For example, is the redundancy of a few justified by a slight commercial benefit for many?
These conceptual difficulties do not preclude the claims of utilitarianism to provide a template for moral leadership. They do, however, highlight the need for clarification of what is understood by “the greatest good for the greatest number”. Conceptual difficulties do not exhaust the problems presented by utilitarianism though, for the leader wishing to maximise the good, however “the good” may be conceptualised, must also confront some substantial practical challenges.

Chief amongst these practical challenges is the need for leaders to forecast the consequences of their decisions and actions. This is a particularly onerous undertaking given the nature of the leadership role. Those who occupy formal leadership positions in organizations are called upon to make many decisions. Those decisions are likely to impact on many people, so will be particularly influential on the store of common good. Therefore, in terms of both the quantity and potency of decision-making, utilitarianism imposes a heavy burden on leaders. Not only must they anticipate the likely effects of their actions on diverse groups of people, and perhaps also on other sentient and non-sentient beings; they must also carry out complex equations of the amount of good that may flow from alternative courses of action. To this complexity is added uncertainty: leaders can be sure neither of the outcomes of their actions nor of the degree to which those actions may bring about their intended outcomes.

One response to such practical difficulties revolves around the distinction between act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism proposes that each specific act should be evaluated according to the amount of good that it promotes. According to act utilitarianism, a leader should weigh up every single action in accordance with its likely outcomes in order to identify the moral course; a seemingly impossible project. Rule utilitarians, on the other hand, acknowledge the impracticality of placing moral agents under such an onerous decision-making regime and base morality, instead, around a set of rules that, in general, can be expected to maximise good. According to rule utilitarianism then, a leader would need to follow a set of moral principles which, generally, are found to promote the greatest good for the greatest number.

An extreme version of rule utilitarianism goes a stage further in according sanctity to utility-maximising rules in every case; even in those cases where following the rule would undoubtedly diminish the total amount of good. This is because disregarding a utility-maximising rule, even in those rare cases in which the greater good would thus be promoted, would undermine respect for that rule. According to extreme rule utilitarians,
unless rules are enforced in all circumstances, those rules will lose their sanctity. Therefore, for a leader to contravene a utilitarian rule, even when doing so would appear to be consistent with the greater good in that particular instance, is morally wrong. This seems to be the principle that underpins extreme versions of free-market, economic theory: that the uninhibited workings of economic markets, although they may be unkind to some in the short term, will ultimately promote the greatest good for the greatest number. Leaders of business organizations who adhere to the rule of market freedom will therefore permit Adam Smith's “invisible hand” (1998 [1776]: 292) to perform its beneficent role in the belief that this will, in the long time, be for the greater good of all.6

The legitimacy of this particular rule utilitarian rationale for market liberalism has, however, been challenged on two counts. Firstly, a number of observers (e.g. Stiglitz, 2001; Turner, 2002; Kay, 2003) have pointed out that free markets do not necessarily offer the surest route to the economic growth as their advocates claim7. Secondly, many commentators (e.g. Marcuse, 2002 [1964]; Galbraith, 1999 [1958]; Hamilton, 2003) challenge market liberals' association of the common good with economic prosperity, suggesting that human wellbeing cannot be reduced to economic indicators and that unbridled pursuit of economic growth may undermine the social and environmental conditions upon which human flourishing depends.

An alternative application of rule utilitarianism to the leadership context comprises its synthesis with a limited specification of the universe of moral relevance. This synthesis proposes that overall good will be maximised as long as leaders focus their attentions on promoting the good of certain groups. For example, it might be argued that organizational leaders are best placed to influence the good of groups such as shareholders, employees or customers. Although their decisions also affect more distant groups, these effects will be minor in comparison to those for the more proximate groups. Since these more proximate stakeholders are those upon which leaders will have the greatest impact, by focusing their attentions on maximising the good for these groups they will be most likely to maximise the total amount of good. Therefore, leaders should always follow the rule of maximising the good of those defined groups.

6 It is worth noting that, at the other end of the political spectrum, a rule utilitarian rationale also seems to lie behind the repressive cruelty of Stalinism.

7 Events of the summer and autumn of 2008 offer some support for this argument, at least as far as financial markets go, while the appointment of Lord Turner as Chairman of the Financial Services Authority might be interpreted as an acknowledgement of its merits on the part of the UK's financial and political establishment.
Such is the form taken by certain articulations of shareholder theory (e.g. Hayek, 1969 [1960]; Friedman, 1970). These commentators suggest that business leaders are best placed to promote the good of shareholders by maximising profits: this is the task for which their training and skills qualify them. Therefore, if businesses leaders prioritise the rule of shareholder wealth-maximisation over and above all other considerations, this will, ultimately, work to the benefit of everyone. However, this suggestion has also been energetically challenged by commentators who suggest that the prioritisation of shareholder interests will actually undermine the common good (Hutton, 1996 and 1997) rather than promoting it. Therefore, as a rationale for business ethics, the utilitarian rules of respect for free economic markets and the prioritisation of shareholder wealth are both hotly contested. They therefore offer bases for ethical organizational leadership that are, to say the least, controversial.

I will make one final observation about rule utilitarianism in order to clarify the distinction between it and non-consequentialism. Rule utilitarianism might seem to offer a bridge between consequentialist ethics and the non-consequentialist theories considered below insofar as both call upon moral leaders to respect certain principles come what may. So, even when the consequences of upholding a principle may reduce the total amount of good, the sanctity of that principle must nevertheless be respected. However, the derivation of that sanctity is different in each case. For the rule utilitarian, it derives from the desirability of the consequences of following that rule in most cases and therefore of upholding its sanctity in every case. For the deontologist, on the other hand, it derives from an intrinsic or categorical desirability which resides within that principle irrespective of either its general or specific consequences. I will now turn to non-consequentialist theory to explore some of the explanations that have been offered to account for the intrinsic desirability of various principles.

Non-Consequentialist Ethics and Leadership

Whereas consequentialist theory focuses on the outcomes of moral actions, non-consequentialist theories give precedence to those actions themselves. According to non-consequentialist theory, actions are judged to be morally right or wrong to the extent that they conform to fundamental principles which carry universal, categorical worth irrespective of the states of affairs that they may or may not bring about. Therefore, whereas utilitarianism would judge the ethicality of leadership in relation to its propensity to

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8 Although Friedman actually offers a range of consequentialist and non-consequentialist rationales for his claim that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.
maximise good, non-consequentialist perspectives would call upon leaders to respond to universal standards of moral rightness that have primacy over, and which may countermand, desirable consequences. These universal standards of moral rightness are generally expressed in terms of duties and rights. For this reason, the term *deontological* is often used to refer to non-consequentialist moral theory.

The notion of universal human rights and corresponding duties is firmly entrenched in the Western ethical and political tradition. It provided a rationale for the American Independence movement, which championed the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, while the French Revolution codified the right to liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression (Almond, 1993). The perceived abuse of human rights has also offered a basis for the criticism of political regimes throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. Unlike the negative, protective framing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contemporary rights theory may also offer a positive aspect by focussing on the provision of social benefits by government, such as education and health care (Almond, 1993).

A discourse of rights and duties is also commonplace within the corporate context. Large corporations have been criticised either for complicity in state abuse of human rights or for direct abuse of the rights of groups such as employees, local communities and customers (e.g. Chomsky, 1999; Klein, 2001). Conversely, respect for human rights figures prominently in the self-legitimating claims that characterise the espoused social policies of many large corporations (e.g. BP, 2007; Coca-Cola, 2007; Nike, 2007; Shell, 2007; Tesco, 2007). A deontological tone is also prominent in the way in which the employment relationship is often conceptualised; that is, as a relationship in which employees' rights and organizations' complementary duties of care form one side of a deontological equation which is balanced, on the other side, by a valorisation of loyalty on the part of employees. Similar notions of obligations and rights also emerge in corporate governance theory. The right to hold property, championed by Locke (1988 [1690]) and more recently by Nozick (1974), comprises a significant component of shareholder theory's prioritisation of management's agentic duty to maximise shareholder wealth (Friedman, 1970). On the other hand, normative stakeholding (Donaldson and Preston, 1995) emphasises corporations' duties to a wide range of other groups as well as shareholders. Clearly, then, deontological theory is consistent with intuitive conceptions of morality, particularly insofar as it relates to the contemporary organizational context.
Deontological ethics clearly requires some means of identifying and legitimising rights and responsibilities. Traditional, pre-Enlightenment ethics looked to religion to provide both the detail and the justification of deontological codes. Post-Classical, Western moral philosophy up to the seventeenth century is deeply rooted in theology and even the theorists of the Enlightenment were concerned to reconcile their rationally-based enquiry with religious doctrine. Religion has also exercised an influence on the modern business and leadership ethics landscape. The early twentieth-century philanthropic business activities of the Cadbury and Rowntree families were deeply influenced by Quaker belief (Kennedy, 2000; Freeman, 2004), while spirituality continues to shape the moral commitments of some managers through organizations such as the Christian Association of Business Executives and the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility.

Secular, non-rationally-based explanations have also been offered to account for moral rights and duties. Notable amongst these are W.D. Ross's (1930) theory of *prima facie* duties and Thomas Nagel's (1986) proposal that knowledge of right and wrong can be accessed through the application of common intuition. Accounts such as these veer towards the existentialist meta-ethic that I will discuss in the next chapter. However, they differ from existentialism insofar as they are premised upon a universalist rather than a relativist meta-ethical understanding.

During empirical research I will remain open to the possibility that research participants may offer accounts of their moral responsibilities that appeal to religious principles. I will also keep in mind the possibility of a secular, non-rationalist, universalist understanding. However, in the present discussion I will focus on those deontological accounts that have arguably been most influential on Western moral philosophy and which, perhaps for this reason, are most commonly included in the reviews of ethics theory that appear in business ethics texts (e.g. Chryssides and Kaler, 1993; Mellahi and Wood, 2003; Crane and Matten, 2004) and in discussions of HRM and ethics (e.g. Legge 1998 and 2006; Winstanley and Woodall, 2000). These are *contract theory* and *Kantian* moral philosophy. I will also discuss the theory of justice offered by John Rawls, which combines elements of contract theory and Kantian ethics and which has also receives quite a lot of attention in contemporary business ethics literature.

*Contract theory*

Contract theory posits a tacit contractual agreement between members of a community to abide by certain conventions and, in particular, to respect the rights and duties that those
conventions entail. This inevitably involves some curtailment of the liberty of those members to act as they might otherwise choose. However, contract theorists propose that members freely agree to such curtailment of their liberty because it is in their long-term interest to do so.

The notion of a tacit social contract as a basis for moral obligations first appears in the political and moral philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes proposes that men and women are, by nature, free but that they choose to accept limitations to their freedom because this brings about a state of affairs that is more advantageous for them than one in which everyone has unbridled freedom to do whatever they choose. Hobbes envisages a state of nature without controls on freedom in which the life of man would necessarily be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (1985 [1651]: 186). For Hobbes, the rationale for political rule lies in avoidance of the unpleasantness that this state of nature entails. Applied to the ethical arena, contract theory suggests that we contract to limitations on the pursuit of our own immediate interests on the condition that others will do likewise. We thus avoid the unpleasant consequences that unbridled pursuit of short-term self-interest by everyone else would bring for us personally.

It is important to emphasise that the nature of the social contract is generally regarded as tacit. Few contract theorists would argue that an actual contractual agreement had ever taken place. Hobbes’ (1985 [1651]) application of the notion of contract appeals not to a historical event but to a conceptual notion that explains why it is in our enlightened self-interest to accept limitations on our liberty. The assumption that underpins contract theory is that, in order to remain within a community and enjoy the benefits offered by membership of that community, we make a tacit agreement to abide by its conventions. Our continued presence in a community thus implies fealty to its conventions and agreement to any restrictions on personal liberty that this may entail.

Contract theory offers a deontological foundation for leadership responsibilities, particularly insofar as it draws attention to tacit or implied contractual arrangements that may pervade leader-follower relations within work organizations. Some of the contractual responsibilities that circumscribe workplace arrangements are legally enshrined, so have a compulsion which goes beyond moral imperatives. Formal contracts of employment provide a legally enforceable, minimum definition of the mutual rights and responsibilities that define the employment relationship. However, in addition to legally defined, explicit commitments, relationships between organizational leaders and employees are also subject to tacit, mutual agreements that are not legally defined. Within contemporary HRM theory,
the term *psychological contract* has been adopted to describe the tacit conditions which define employers' and employees' expectations of one another (Guest and Conway, 2002; Conway and Briner, 2005). The psychological contract thus offers an example of how contract theory might be operationalised in the modern work context. It refers to a set of imprecise expectations, based more on precedent than on formal statement of intent. It defines notions of fairness with respect to the balance between employee input and non-material rewards, including development opportunities, promotion, feedback, task-allocation and the nature of the working environment. It also embraces expectations of job security on the part of employees as well as expectations of employees' loyalty on the part of employers.

To apply the Hobbesian notion of social contract to the psychological contract is to understand the latter as a tacit acknowledgement, rooted in enlightened self-interest, of the legitimacy of the principles of right and duty which circumscribe the relationship between an organization and its employees. The actions of leaders within those organizations might thus be evaluated in relation to those principles. Such an interpretation acquires moral complexity, however, from the possibility that those tacit contractual arrangements may originate from bargaining positions that are characterised by power differentials. Those power differentials may operate at an overt level (Haugaard, 2002), where followers agree to tacit contractual terms because they perceive that they have little choice in the matter. The legitimacy of contract theory depends to a large extent on the assumption of choice: if remaining within a group is to be taken as a tacit accord on the part of group members to adhere to the conventions of that group, then it is reasonable to assume that those group members have a choice; i.e. that they have somewhere else to go should they decide that that group is not for them.

This is a potential flaw in contract theory, in both its political and its workplace applications. The proposal that all citizens are free to leave a society if they do not find its conventions to their liking is nonsense. Equally, the contention that all members of a work organization can easily take their services to other employers takes no account of either the realities of the job market or the switching costs involved in changing jobs. Although employees who are fortunate enough to possess sought after skills (including proven leadership skills) may enjoy a degree of flexibility in their choice of workplace, and also a more solid platform from which to negotiate both tacit and explicit contractual commitments, the majority are not so well placed.
But power differentials do not only operate at overt levels. Bachrach and Baratz (2002 [1962]) draw attention to the covert manner in which some parties to a contractual agreement may limit the parameters within which that accord is reached. At a still more covert level, Steven Lukes (2002 [1974]) suggests that power differentials may be instrumental in shaping some parties’ perceptions of their interests so that they willingly accord to contractual terms that are contrary to what they might, in a more enlightened state of mind, consider to be their best interests.

Considerations such as these do not preclude appeal to the psychological contract as a social-contract style basis for legitimating rights and duties within leader-follower relationships. However, if the psychological contract is to offer such a basis of legitimation, it is reasonable to expect that agreement to its terms is accorded under certain conditions. These conditions include absence of coercion, the availability of alternatives and access to information. Psychological contractual agreements that are shaped by asymmetrical power relationships or misinformation, or where the only choice is to take it or leave it, provide a basis of moral legitimation that is questionable to say the least.

**Kantian theory**

An alternative perspective on deontological ethics is provided by Immanuel Kant. Kant’s moral philosophy needs to be understood within the context of his enquiry into the possibility of rational knowledge (2003, [1787]). Kant proposes that we cannot have rational knowledge of the “noumenal”, or real, world. This is because our experience of that real world is necessarily filtered by what he called the “transcendental” framework of our senses and our conceptual understanding. We can, however, reflect on the nature of that transcendental framework and thereby acquire indubitable, universal knowledge about it. By defining truths to which our transcendental framework must conform, we can derive truths about the world as it will necessarily appear to us. Those truths are not about the world as it is in itself; they are about the world as it will always be as far as any rational being is concerned.

Applying this process to moral enquiry, Kant derives transcendental truths about moral understanding (1997 [1788]; 1948 [1797]). In other words, by reflecting on the nature of our moral understanding, he identifies fundamental presuppositions which will always hold true for moral judgements. Most importantly, for Kant, the notion of moral action is inseparable from the notion of autonomy; autonomy from the influence of anything except the practical reason of the agent. Autonomous action is thus action which is motivated
purely by a rational apprehension of duty. It is not influenced by desires, emotions or personal interests. According to Kant, it is this autonomy of the will that is ultimately deserving of moral esteem for it manifests the true nature of humanity. It is therefore the sole principle of moral action and moral judgement. Kant concludes that the only acts which qualify for moral approbation are acts that are performed out of a sense of duty.

The status of autonomy as a fundamental precondition of moral action also provides a basis for determining the content of moral duty. Kant refers to the principle by which we determine our duty as the \textit{categorical imperative}. The categorical imperative is, for Kant, a basic principle without which the very concept of moral understanding would be meaningless. It is universally binding on all rational creatures because rational thought about morality presupposes it. Kant proposed a number of formulations of the categorical imperative, of which two have been particularly influential. The first of these is often referred to as the \textit{principle of universalisability}. It proposes that, since moral action must be based on the application of reason alone, and since reason is a homogenous faculty that is shared with all other rational agents (unlike desires, which vary between people), then the principle upon which we act must be universalisable. Kant expresses this as: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law" (1948 [1797]: 84). Many intuitively immoral acts would be conveniently proscribed by this principle since, were they universalised, they would be self-defeating. For example, telling a lie only achieves its desired objective if the general expectation is that people will not tell lies: if everyone lied then there would be no point in lying because the liar would not be believed. To tell a lie whilst wishing for the universalisation of lying would therefore be irrational and thus, according to Kant's dictum, it would also be immoral.

To apply Kant's principle of universalisability to the leadership context would be to invite leaders to identify the principles upon which they are acting when they make ethically charged decisions and to ask themselves whether they would be happy for all people to act upon that principle in similar circumstances. It would call upon them to project themselves into the positions of those who are on the receiving end of their ethically charged pronouncements and ask themselves how they, from that perspective of empathic engagement, would feel about the fairness of those pronouncements.

The second influential formulation of the categorical imperative is sometimes referred to as the \textit{principle of ends}. Given that autonomous beings are not just the agents but are also the repositories of all value, Kant proposes that they should always be treated as ends in their own right. The principle is expressed by Kant as: "Act in such a way that you always treat
humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (1948 [1797]: 91).

Now, the application of the principle of ends, to the world of organizational leadership seems at first glance to be rather impractical. For surely, at least part of what we expect of any leader is that they coordinate the resources that are at the disposal of the organization that they lead and that they apply these to the achievement of the objectives of that organization. Whatever those objectives may be, whether they relate to commercial accumulation, public service or charitable ends, leaders are expected to use the resources available to them, including people, to assist the achievement of those ends. Thus, all of the stakeholders who contribute in some way to the achievement of an organization’s aims are being used as a means to the achievement of those ends.

However, a less rigorous, although more literal, translation of Kant’s principle of ends avoids this apparent impracticality. Kant’s precise wording of the second formulation does not necessarily preclude treating people as means to an end; it only precludes treating them simply as a means. It does not disallow treating people as a means as long as they are also treated at the same time as an end. According to this interpretation, it would be permissible to use people as a means to the achievement of an organization’s ends as long as they are regarded, at the same time, as ends in themselves. Thus, it would be acceptable for a commercial organization to regard customers as a source of revenue as long as, at the same time, it treats them as ends in themselves. For example, it might regard the delivery of customer satisfaction not just as a means to making profit but also as a goal that carries intrinsic worth. Similarly, employees should not be viewed by leaders as purely instrumental to organizational success; rather, they should also be accorded intrinsic value. So, instead of cherishing employees as long as they offer the most cost-effective source of labour and then casting them aside as cheaper labour markets emerge, leaders should ascribe unconditional worth to their workforce. A similarly respectful approach should be extended to suppliers, shareholders and also to other groups upon whom organizational success depends.

To apply Kant’s principle of ends to contemporary organizational contexts need not, then, morally invalidate the governance principles common to those contexts. To apply it as I have suggested would, however, prescribe a particular governance model. It would invalidate an understanding of the organization which regards profitability and shareholder wealth as the overriding imperatives, and which calls for other stakeholder groups to be treated as no more than instrumental to the achievement of that end. It can thus be used to
validate a normative stakeholding (Donaldson and Preston, 1995) governance model, which calls for the interests of all organizational stakeholders to be taken into account in corporate decision making. On the other hand, it would morally invalidate the shareholder (Hayek, 1969 [1960]; Freidman, 1970; Sternberg, 1998/1999/2000) model of governance, which subordinates the interests of all stakeholders to those of shareholders, since this treats the former purely as means to the end of promoting the wealth of the latter.

Kant’s rather convoluted reasoning thus delivers two principles which seem to offer a workable basis for evaluating the morality of organizational leadership. The principle of universalisability invites moral agents to consider whether they would wish the principle upon which they act to be universally adopted. It calls upon leaders to place themselves in the position of those who are affected by their actions and to consider the rightness of those actions from the point of view of those others. The second principle, Kant’s principle of ends, might be otherwise described as a “principle of respect for persons”. In a leadership decision-making scenario it would call upon leaders to consider all stakeholders as having value in themselves.

Despite the apparent usefulness of these two formulations of Kant’s categorical imperative, his theory does seem over rigorous in one respect. This is Kant’s insistence that only acts performed in response to a sense of duty carry moral worth. According to this stipulation, a leader who is driven by non-moral imperatives but whose actions are nevertheless coincidental with duty should not attract moral approbation. On the one hand, this criterion is intuitively appealing insofar as it precludes from moral approbation CSR policies that pretend environmental or social concern but which are motivated purely by a desire to engender positive public relations. So, for example, leaders who dedicate the resources of their organizations to charitable causes but who do so purely in order to gather the kudos that such charitable action might attract would not, according to a Kantian evaluation, attract moral praise. This seems, intuitively, to be correct.

However, Kant’s stipulation that only acts that are performed out of a sense of duty should attract moral approbation also seems rather severe. It precludes emotionally motivated acts from moral approbation, so leaders who are driven by altruism, charity or benevolence to pursue intuitively appealing moral agendas should not necessarily attract moral praise. Kind people do not seem to have much moral worth in the Kantian system; attributions of worth are reserved for the rationally dutiful.
The distinction that some of Kant's commentators draw between perfect and imperfect duties serves to address this point and also responds to a further limitation of deontological ethics: that duty-based ethics tells us what we must and must not do but it has little to say outside this morally legislative minimum. Although Kant does not offer an explicit and unambiguous definition of these two categories of duty (Rosen, 1996), the distinction generally drawn from a broad reading of his work by his commentators (e.g. O. Neal, 1993; Allison, 2005) is that a perfect duty is a duty to which, under any circumstances, one is bound. Imperfect duties, on the other hand, respond to the inevitability of relations of mutual dependency between humans. Based on this assumption of mutual dependency, it would be irrational for us to will that sentiments such as benevolence did not exist. However, these duties seem to be less complete than perfect duties since we cannot fulfil them absolutely: we cannot be benevolent or sympathetic to everyone in the world.

Applying this distinction between perfect and imperfect duties to the organizational leadership context, we might, by employing either formulation of the categorical imperative, identify a leader's perfect duties. For example, we might thus identify obligations to certain groups who have a formal relationship with the organization: its shareholders, employees, suppliers etc. However, fulfilling these duties does not exhaust the possibilities of ethical leadership, for beneficent conduct towards other groups with whom no formal relationship exists might be included under the heading of imperfect duties. Although precedence is accorded to the leader's perfect duties, a moral leader might also be expected to observe imperfect duties to wider groups.

**John Rawls' theory of justice**

I will end this brief tour of principle-based ethical theory by mentioning a recent approach proposed by John Rawls (1971). Rawls' *theory of justice* incorporates elements of both contract theory and Kant's principle of universalisability and also adds a vital third ingredient: the notion of fairness. It thus arrives at conclusions that avoid some of the difficulties with contract theory that were alluded to earlier and which also refines Kant's principle. Like contract theorists, Rawls roots a system of rights in the idea of a hypothetical pre-social condition, proposing that the duties incumbent upon moral agents are those which they would commit to were they placed in this imaginary situation. However, Rawls introduces the notion of a "veil of ignorance". He invites moral decision-makers to reflect on the contractual arrangements that they would agree to were they ignorant of their own eventual status, talents or potentials. Ethical behaviour, for Rawls, is
that which “free and rational persons (who are) concerned to further their own interests” (1971: 10) would accept if placed behind such a hypothetical veil of ignorance.

Applying Rawls’ theory to leadership would invite leaders to assume this hypothetical “original position”; to undertake an imagined dismantling of the privileges that attend their rank and ask themselves how they might then appraise the fairness of their pronouncements. Now, whether or not leaders can easily make the imaginative leap that is required in order to don Rawls’ proposed veil of ignorance is open to question. Rawls’ prescription supposes that people are able to stand back from the reality of their existential circumstances sufficiently to make hypothetical assessments of value. His theory has also been criticised (for example by Maclntyre, 1985) on the basis that different decision makers would tolerate different levels of risk in seeking to maximise their self-interest. Different people would therefore choose different standards of justice when placed behind the veil of ignorance: some would be willing to take a gamble on receiving a fortuitous allocation of talents, so would be inclined to adopt a less charitable disposition. Others would go for the safer option and opt for minimal differentiation in benefits.

Nevertheless, by introducing the veil of ignorance, Rawls goes some way to responding to the challenge of asymmetrical bargaining positions mentioned earlier in relation to contract theory. Leaders who follow Rawls moral prescription would not just respond to tacit contractual commitments which may be arrived at through positions of unequal power; they would be expected to reflect on the fairness of those commitments from a position of imagined impartiality. Rawls also responds to a criticism of Kant’s principle of universalisation. Kant’s principle invites leaders to ask themselves whether they would wish the maxim upon which they act to be universally adopted. However, they are asked to make that judgement from their privileged position of leadership. Again, Rawls takes things back a stage. He asks leaders to follow the course of action they would choose if placed in an original position where they were ignorant of their eventual status.

Concluding Comments

I will complete this discussion of principle-based theory with some general observations concerning its application to the leadership context. The first observation is that principle-based ethics offers a basis for unilateral, moral decision-making on the part of leaders. If morality is just a matter of applying the right rules, then leaders who are equipped with those rules, and who have the necessary moral perspicacity to apply them accurately, can
unilaterally audit the ethicality of their actions and decisions. Principle-based theory therefore holds the promise of personally-derived moral authorisation.

However, while unilateral moral evaluation is thus theoretically legitimised, its practice is no simple matter. Quite apart from choosing which to favour from the pantheon of principle-based theories – a question about which moral philosophers have yet to agree and about which I will say more shortly – the application of both utilitarian and deontological principles a fraught with practical difficulties. Utilitarian analysis demands clear definition of the common good. It also requires leaders to make complex predictions of the consequences of their actions and their likely impact on different groups. Although rule utilitarianism offers a potential escape from the decisionistic burden that is imposed by act utilitarianism, it also presents its own difficulties. Chief amongst these is that, if disagreements in the fields of corporate governance and macro-economic theory are anything to go by, the identification of unproblematic, utility-maximising rules is no simple matter.

The application of deontological theory is no less equivocal. Apart from the conceptual difficulties with deontological theories that have already been mentioned, their employment in leadership contexts is likely to involve complex matters of interpretation as well as fine adjudications between perceived responsibilities to different people, and even perhaps responsibilities to non-people. However sensible and straightforward these principles may seem in theory, their use in real life situations demands intricate qualitative evaluations that will tax any decision maker.

While challenges such as these need not preclude the relevance of principle-based theory for leadership ethics, they place a heavy burden on any leaders who choose to impose a personally-defined moral agenda on their organization. Quite apart from everything else that is required of leaders – including all those personal qualities that the effectiveness literature has identified – they would also need to be moral sages. It therefore seems sensible for leaders to share the onerous burden of moral authorisation of their actions, decisions and effects.

My second observation relates to the sheer breadth and variety of principle-based theories. In this chapter I have discussed some of the most frequently cited approaches, but there are many more. As Zygmunt Bauman observes, these theories “speak in different voices, one praising what the other condemns. They clash and contradict each other, each claiming the authority the others deny” (1993: 20). The possible consequences of this breadth and
variety are twofold. On the one hand, leaders who seek guidance from principle-based theory may find themselves bewildered by the multiplicity of perspectives, each of which seems sensible and intuitively appealing in its own right but each of which may legitimise courses of action which others proscribe. Surrounded by such an array of alternative versions of right, it is difficult to know which way to turn.

In the hands of someone who is keen to do the right thing, then, the breadth and diversity of principle-based theory and the complexities of choice that it entails might be seen as a challenge. But perhaps the more pernicious outcome of this breadth and diversity is that it may render moral judgement prone to a sort of expedient flexibility. Whereas leaders who are anxious to select a moral course may find the heterogeneity of principle-based ethics problematic, those who are more concerned with finding convenient moral rationales for their decisions than actually informing those decisions may be attracted to the possibilities that this heterogeneity presents. Those leaders who do not seek moral guidance but who, instead, seek to legitimise decisions that have already been made without reference to moral sensitivities may not have to look too far to find a convenient justification. This expedient flexibility is further enhanced by the complexities of application already referred to. While these complexities of application complicate the task of moral decision-making, they also facilitate the application of different theories to justify diametrically contrasting agendas. Therefore, whatever organizational leaders may choose to do, they should be able to find a suitable principle-based theory which can be applied in such a way as to justify their actions.

The worrying implications of this expedient flexibility are partly ameliorated by a presupposition that principle-based theories hold in common: this is their assumption of consistency in application. A presupposition that underpins utilitarian and deontological rationales is that their respective principles apply for all people in all situations. The rationality common to all principle-based ethics demands this. Principle-based theories cannot therefore be regarded as a quiver of moral rationales from which agents may select whichever arrow matches the course of action that they wish to legitimise at a particular time. It is not morally legitimate for leaders to pick-and-mix principle-based rationales in order to conveniently justify courses of action to which they may feel attracted on non-moral grounds. If a leader chooses to apply a particular theory in a particular way to justify a course of action in one scenario, it seems reasonable to expect them to adopt the same criteria in other situations.
However, even the principle of consistency in application is not without its problems. Consistent application requires that, if a principle is applied in a particular way in situation A then, if situation B arises in which all things are equal, the same principle should be applied in the same way in situation B. However, all things never are equal (Toulmin, 1990). Situation A and situation B are different situations, each with their own specific circumstances, some of which approximate, some of which differ. The moral agent who chooses to apply a principle consistently in both situations does so because that agent has decided that the dimensions across which both situations approximate are the morally relevant ones. Someone else may see things otherwise; may identify morally relevant dimensions across which the two situations differ and which therefore call for a different mode of application. The apprehension of sameness is subjectively defined.

My third point relates to John Kaler’s (1999) observation that ethics theory has no practical value for ethical decision making in business contexts. Kaler suggests that we do not tend to think about practical moral problems in terms of principles such as “maximisation of the good” or by considering specific rights and duties. Instead, he suggests that we act on a sort of gut feel about what is morally right. Kaler’s point can be illustrated using the metaphor of a snooker player who is about to take a difficult shot. The snooker player does not calculate angles and velocities with the aid of tools and calculators, before applying the laws of applied physics to decide at what point, with what force and with what degree of spin to strike the ball. The player takes a stroll around the table to familiarise herself or himself with the overall situation before striking the ball in a way that seems appropriate to those circumstances. Similarly, Kaler suggests that people confronted with business ethics decisions base those decisions, not on the application of principles, but on an overall apprehension of what is the morally correct thing to do in the circumstances. Indeed, Kaler notes that we tend to test our moral theories with reference to our common sense judgements of right and wrong, rather than the other way round. If a theoretical principle points in a direction with which we feel morally uncomfortable, he suggests, we would be more inclined to ditch the theoretical principle than to act against our moral gut feel.

If we agree with Kaler, then there would seem to be little need for principle-based theories in the evaluation of moral leadership: we should let intuitive moral judgement be our guide rather than going to the trouble of interpreting and applying theoretical principles. Combining Kaler’s analysis with my earlier observations about the expedient flexibility of principle-based theory, we might conclude that the latter’s prime purpose is a justificatory one: it is used purely to reassure ourselves and to persuade others of the ethical probity of the actions towards which our intuitive moral judgement has already pointed us.
Criticisms such as these have led some theorists towards an existentialist meta-ethical perspective, which I will discuss shortly. Before doing so, though, I will just say a few words in defence of principle-based ethics. The first point is that, even if Kaler is correct and that business people normally rely on moral intuition rather than ethical principles—a contention that I will test during empirical enquiry—this does not necessarily preclude a role for theoretical principles in addressing moral dilemmas. If we are able to identify the principles that are important to us in those situations where the moral course of action is clearly apparent, then it seems reasonable to use those principles for guidance in situations that are less clear cut. Principle based theory can thus be understood as an attempt to define those imperatives that are morally significant and to design principles that will enable their application to real life dilemmas.

My second point in defence of principle-based theory is that, even if we agree with commentators such as Bauman (1993) and the existentialist theorists that I will discuss shortly that the quest for universally valid moral principles is conceptually misguided, we might nevertheless accede that different principle-based theories serve a useful purpose in drawing our attention to relevant aspects of morally-charged situations that we might not otherwise have considered. A utilitarian perspective invites us to think of the long-term consequences of our actions, particularly as they affect people who might not spring readily to our attention. Similarly, deontological theory serves the purpose of evoking sensitivity to the relationship that a business has with less obvious stakeholders, particularly those who are not able to champion their rights as stridently as others. Even if we agree with Kaler that business people make moral decisions by applying a sort of moral gut-feel, we might still argue that the quality of those decisions can be enhanced if gut feel is exposed to a degree of critical reflection on the part of those business people. And business people's critical reflection may be enriched by considering a dilemma through the lens of a range of principle-based theories.

Contrary to Bauman (1993), who presents the quest for universal, rational, ethical principles as a cunning conspiracy by legislators and philosophers to impose their authority over a plurality of untrustworthy moral intuitions, I suggest that this is the agenda that characterises the majority of principle-based moral philosophy. Bauman may be right that this quest is futile—I reserve judgement on that question. However, I believe that his treatment of the tradition of principle-based moral enquiry is harsh.
3.2 EXISTENTIALIST ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

Whereas the principle-based theories considered in the previous chapter seek to identify absolute bases of moral evaluation, the message that existentialism holds for ethics is that such a quest is futile. Existentialist philosophy can be characterised by both its negative and its positive themes. The negative theme is that universal, objective foundations of moral truth are problematic. The positive implication of this negative theme is that, in the absence of absolute criteria of evaluation, the source of moral truth is to be found within each individual. As Kierkegaard expresses it, "to subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing in subjectivity" (1997 [1846]: 201). Thus, Mary Warnock stresses existentialism's capacity to evoke awareness of the freedom that resides within each of us: "anyone who is an existentialist must adopt the view that men are free, and that their freedom extends further than they will have thought, before their eyes were opened by the study of philosophy" (2003: xvi). According to existentialism, then, leaders who aspire to ethicality cannot appeal to external principles for guidance; they have to consult the font of moral authorship that lies within them.

Critique of Objectivist and Universalist Meta-Ethics

Søren Kierkegaard is widely regarded as a founding father of existentialist philosophy (Kaufman, 1956; Barrett 1990 [1958]; Gardiner, 1988; Langiulli, 1971; Hannay, 2005) and it is in Kierkegaard's work that the roots of both the negative and positive themes of existentialism can be found. In Fear and Trembling (1997b [1843]), Kierkegaard strikes a blow against reliance on conventional standards of morality when he contrasts, on the one hand, the ethical way of life that is lived in accordance with moral convention with, on the other hand, a religious life that follows the dictates of faith. The former, for Kierkegaard, is fundamentally misguided insofar as it appeals to norms which claim an objective legitimacy to which they have no right. Moral convention, for Kierkegaard, comprises closed systems of reasoning that cannot be legitimated externally; the ethical way of life "rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its purpose, but is itself the purpose for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has assimilated this, it does not go any further" (1997b [1843]: 99). MacIntyre sums up the message of Kierkegaard's philosophy thus: "not only are there no objective tests of morality; but ... doctrines which assert that there are function as devices to disguise the fact that our moral standards are, and can only be, chosen" (2002 [1967]: 209).
A more polemical critique of moral convention is delivered by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals* (2003 [1887]). Nietzsche refutes the objective, universal legitimacy of moral standards on the basis that genealogical exploration of conventional morality reveals it to be no more than an expression of the interests of particular types of people. Nietzsche proposes a deterministic understanding of human psychology and physiology: that people can be categorised according to type. He considers type to be determined by birth, so people have little or no control over their psychological or physiological capabilities. In elaborating the implications of type for moral theory, Nietzsche concerns himself with two particular types. On the one hand are the lower types, the herd or the slaves, which includes the mass of humanity. On the other hand are the higher types: the over men or super men; those exceptional individuals who are capable of a level of independence and creativity which elevates them above their fellow beings.

Nietzsche points out that, due to the contrasting capabilities with which lower and higher types are endowed, each type finds itself in very different sets of circumstances. Consequently, their respective interests are served by contrasting normative principles. Therefore, contrasting moralities are prudentially apposite to different types of people. The morality that has come to pervade Western civilisation, according to Nietzsche, is that which is consistent with the interests of the masses: the ascetic, slave morality of the lower types. Values such as compassion, charity and equality have come to dominate our moral intuitions for no reason other than that they promote the interests of the lower types. Thus, “the morality of the vulgar man has triumphed” (Nietzsche, 2003 [1887]: 18) over the elitist and egoistic principles that would be consistent with the interests of the higher types. This triumph is not based on any objective superiority of the former; it represents simply the successful imposition of the self-interest of the masses. Therefore, the principles of ascetic, slave moralities derive from nothing more than the self-interested resentment felt by people of less elevated social status who “deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge” (ibid: 19).

Nietzsche thus professes to have demonstrated the relational nature of moral codes, undermining any claims that the imperatives of slave moralities might make to universal validity. Furthermore, by demonstrating that the triumph of slave morality was “an act of the cleverest revenge” (2003 [1887]: 17) which grew from the “trunk of that tree of revenge and hate” (ibid: 17) and the “festering venom and malignity” (ibid: 21) of the weak and oppressed, Nietzsche claims to have shown that the roots of slave moralities’ imperatives lie in motives that are vilified by the normative substance of those same slave moralities.
He thus exposes not only the self-interested and relativist nature of slave morality but also its hypocrisy.

Having dismantled conventional morality's claims to objective legitimacy, Nietzsche proposes a further argument that challenges the very notion of morality. This argument is based upon a gloomy psychological understanding of humanity: that people are fundamentally driven by a desire to exert power over others. This will to power is, for Nietzsche, the driving force of all human motivation. Any other motives that may seem to motivate our actions are ultimately reducible to the will to power because, when subjected to close analysis, they are found to be instrumental to it. According to Nietzsche, since this is the way that people are, it is futile to pretend otherwise; and it is equally futile to moralise about the consequences of this psychological reality. The strong impose their will on the weak because they can; the weak rail against this subjugation because it inhibits the expression of their own will to power. Nietzsche likens strong people to birds of prey whereas weak people are as the young lambs upon which they feed. Both the strong person and the bird of prey are acting in accordance with basic instinct; it makes no more sense to morally judge strong people for imposing their will on the weak than it does to judge birds of prey for killing young lambs. But just as the lamb will bear a grudge, so, understandably does the weak person: each does what it can to promote its own interests. However, Nietzsche is concerned that, through the hegemony of slave morality, this prudential self-interest of the weak has acquired the force of morality:

this dismal state of affairs, this prudence of the lowest order, which even insects possess ... has, thanks to the counterfeiting and self-deception of weakness, come to masquerade in the pomp of an ascetic, mute and expectant virtue, just as though the very weakness of the weak ... were a voluntary result, something wished, chosen, a deed, an act of merit (2003 [1887]: 26).

Thus far I have emphasised the destructive message in Nietzsche's narrative. He sets out to demolish slave morality's pretensions and, in the process, he challenges the very notion of morality. However, Nietzsche's intention is not just to commit an act of moral vandalism, for this demolition is undertaken in the interests of an overarching constructive agenda. Nietzsche's task is not just to dismantle traditional values; it is to effect a revaluation of values. He is driven by a passionate conviction that not only do the principles of traditional, ascetic, slave morality lack objective validity but that they also constrain human progress. Nietzsche's disquiet about slave morality relates particularly to the ways in which it restrains the elite. Its values have insinuated their way into our ideological presuppositions.
so that happiness is valued over suffering, altruism is placed above self-love, equality is preferred to inequality, the quest for peace and tranquillity inhibits our capacity to endure risk and danger. We are encouraged to inhibit the satisfaction of our instinctual drives, we are expected to show pity and compassion for the suffering of others, and spiritual well-being is valued as compensation for the tribulations of the body.

A major theme of the *Genealogy of Morals* is that the cultural valorisation of these ascetic values will inhibit higher types from realising their potential to further human excellence. Precisely what this human excellence consists of is not clear from Nietzsche’s narrative. It seems to correspond to some vague notion of the realisation of human potential. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s presentation of Goethe, Beethoven and himself as its embodiments (Leiter, 2002) suggests that he judges human excellence largely in terms of intellectual advancement and cultural accomplishment. He does, however, offer a fairly clear picture of the conditions that are necessary for the attainment of excellence. For excellence, in Nietzsche’s view, cannot be achieved without suffering. It also requires prioritisation of the interests of higher types over those of other people; it is inherently unequal. Furthermore, it cannot be achieved without a proclivity for risk and it demands the expression of instinctual drives. The crux of Nietzsche’s concern, then, seems to be that the values of slave morality, having become embedded in our culture, are constraining nascent higher types from cultivating and giving expression to those traits which are essential for the realisation of their potential and thus for the advancement of humankind.

Now, in championing the pursuit of excellence, Nietzsche might be interpreted as evincing an objectivist meta-ethic. Despite his apparent refutation of all objective bases of moral evaluation, his call for a revaluation of morality seems to appeal to overarching notions of excellence and human progress which reveal an objectivist commitment. This apparent ambivalence has been widely debated amongst Nietzsche commentators (e.g. Clark, 1994; Danto, 2002; Foot, 1994; Schacht, 2005). To get too tied up with the question of whether or not Nietzsche contradicts his own apparent moral relativism is, however, to divert attention from a key aspect of his contribution to moral theory. This is that Nietzsche casts a shadow of doubt over the universal desirability of qualities such as charity, benevolence, compassion and equality; qualities whose veneration has pervaded the mainstream of Western ethics. Conversely, he offers a basis for the valorisation of very different human qualities and, in particular, with his call for the “super men” to assert themselves (or
perhaps for the super man or super woman that resides within each of us to assert itself\textsuperscript{10}), he provides an alternative template for moral leadership.

Nietzsche’s overarching preoccupation is with the pursuit of human excellence. Therefore moral leadership that is consistent with a Nietzschean revaluation of values would seem to be leadership that promotes the realisation of human potential. Furthermore, according to my reading of Nietzsche, the methods adopted to pursue excellence need not be constrained by the sensitivities of conventional morality. The Nietzschean leader would be a change-evoking super man [sic] who is able to apply his exceptional talents in order to unite people towards the flourishing of excellence. This can only be achieved if the more capable elite are encouraged to join the leader in fulfilling their potential, unrestrained by considerations of equality, compassion and altruism. Nietzsche thus provides the basis for a characteristically elitist understanding of leadership; one in which, by reason of their innate superiority, leaders are justified in asserting their own agendas over weaker people.

It is perhaps worth noting that Nietzsche’s philosophy as been co-opted to legitimise some of the most appalling leadership agendas of the twentieth century. Many of Nietzsche’s commentators (e.g. Kaufman, 1956; Langiulli, 1971; Leiter, 2002; Schacht, 2005) point out that to paint Nietzsche with the brush of Nazism is unfair, since he despised both German nationalism and anti-Semitism and would have been appalled at the selective misappropriation of his philosophy by the National Socialists of 1930s Germany. Nevertheless, given Nietzsche’s biological determinism, his unashamed elitism and his demolition of many of the values trodden on by Nazi inhumanity, this misappropriation is unsurprising.

**Personal Commitment as a Basis for Moral Legitimacy**

The stark message contained within Nietzsche and Kierkegaard’s writing is that there are no universally valid moral principles in accordance with which moral dilemmas can be resolved. Responsibility is therefore thrown back upon each individual to define their own moral standards. Kierkegaard stresses that the legitimacy of a moral sentiment derives not from conformity to some objective, universal reality but from the commitment with which it is experienced. Kierkegaard thus challenges the Cartesian notion of truth as residing in correspondence between belief and reality. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1997c

\textsuperscript{10} A less literal interpretation of Nietzsche’s work is that, rather than proposing an elitist social ethic, he is merely calling upon every individual to strive for their own self-actualisation and to release their own potential for excellence. I find it hard to believe, though, that the polemical narrative of the *Genealogy of Morals* was only intended by Nietzsche to be read metaphorically.
Kierkegaard proposes a subjectivist notion of truth as an alternative to the objectivism of the Cartesian position, using this notion of subjective truth to legitimise Christian faith: as far as Kierkegaard is concerned, religious truth does not derive from correspondence between thinking and being; it concerns the relationship between the thinker and that which is thought:

the issue is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual’s relation to Christianity, consequently not about the indifferent individual’s systematic eagerness to arrange truths of Christianity in paragraphs but rather about the concern of the infinitely interested individual with regard to his own relation to such a doctrine (Kierkegaard, 1997c [1846]: 189).

Therefore, the criterion of religious truth does not lie in correspondence with a supposed external reality but in the sincerity with which the believer believes: “the passion of the infinite, not its content, is the deciding factor” (Kierkegaard, 1997c [1846]: 206). It is this passion, this emotional engagement, which, for Kierkegaard, is lacking in uncritical conformity to moral convention. By basing moral decision-making on conventionally accepted ethical norms, a moral agent adopts a passive relationship with his or her decision. This passivity is inherently limiting because that decision is thus deprived of emotional engagement. The application of conventional, principle-based morality comprises rational accounting in accordance with rules; rules which, according to Kierkegaard, not only lack the external legitimacy they claim but which also offer an inadequate basis for meaningful personal engagement. Decisions that are made on the basis of direct, personal faith, on the other hand, are characterised by commitment.

For Kierkegaard, the importance of personal commitment is not confined to the validation of religious faith. In Either/Or (1997a [1843]), through the words of the fictitious Judge Wilhelm, Kierkegaard stresses the self-actualising force of choice: the act of choosing is its own reward; when the spirit is deprived of choice it “withers away in atrophy” (1997a [1843]: 72). The value of choice is intrinsic to the act of choosing; it derives not from the outcome of the choice but from the degree of personal commitment that is invested in that choice: “what is important in choosing is not so much to choose the right thing as the energy, the earnestness, and the pathos with which one chooses” (ibid: 73-74).

Leaders who measure themselves according to Kierkegaardian standards would therefore need to be comfortable with the responsibility entailed in acts of choice. They would need to weigh their decisions not in accordance with rational accounting of conventionally
accepted norms but in relation to the strength of their personal conviction. The right course of action, for Kierkegaardian leaders, is that to which they can wholeheartedly commit themselves. External measures of moral rightness give way to the leader's personal engagement as the sole criterion of legitimacy. Kierkegaard notes that this affirmation of personal commitment often requires sustained challenge to the status-quo: like Nietzsche's prophetic, Zarathustran superman (2003a [1983-85]), the Kierkegaardian champion of passionate engagement may have to stand alone against convention; he "must comprehend that no one can understand him, and must have the constancy to put up with it that human language has for him naught but curses and the human heart has for his sufferings only the feeling that he is guilty" (Kierkegaard, 1967 [1845], cited by Gardiner, 1988: 62).

Heidegger and Sartre and the Nature of Being

Whereas Kierkegaard's acclamation of personal commitment and choice is both polemical and imbued with religious fervour, Heidegger and Sartre deliver endorsements of individual responsibility that are more sober and secular in style and which are also constructed upon more systematic rationales than Kierkegaard's. Heidegger's Being and Time forms part of an unfinished ontological exploration of the nature of Being. It addresses specifically the question of what it is to be human, or, in Heidegger's words, the nature of Dasein\(^{11}\), the (human) being, for which "in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (1962 [1926]: 32). A significant outcome of Heidegger's enquiry is that individual responsibility is intrinsic to any authentic embodiment of the human condition. Sartre reaches a similar conclusion in Being and Nothingness, in his case via an exploration of the nature of consciousness. For Sartre, authentic existence demands acknowledgement of the ineluctable freedom which defines human consciousness. For Sartre, "what we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of 'human reality'. Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free" (2003 [1943]: 49).

Heidegger derives his notion of authentic being from consideration of three aspects of the human condition: its Being-in-the-World, its temporality and its intersubjective character. By Being-in-the-World, Heidegger refers neither to Dasein's physical containment within its surroundings nor its physical proximity to other worldly entities. He refers, rather, to the dialectical process of signification by which the "World" that Dasein is "in" is accorded

\(^{11}\) When discussing Heidegger's work I have followed the German convention, applied by the author and also by his translators and most of his commentators, of capitalising the first letter of many of the key terms that he uses to explain his theories.
significance and in relation to which Dasein defines itself. The "World" within which
Dasein dwells, in a Heideggerian sense, is therefore a world of mutual signification and
reference.

A key aspect of Dasein's Being-in-the-World is the inevitability of care, or concern: "the
Being of Dasein itself is to be made visible as care" (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]:83-84).
When Heidegger uses these terms he does not do so in the sense of custodial care or
guardianship, nor do these terms carry any implication of benevolent or compassionate
intent (Polt, 1999). He simply means that each person's World matters for them, not in the
obvious sense in which it sustains their biological and emotional needs, but in the sense that
they cannot interact with it other than with some predisposition towards it.

For Heidegger, the way in which care or concern defines Dasein's relationship with its
World, must be grasped within the context of temporality. That is, care and concern can
only be conceived in terms of Dasein's past and future. The disposition that defines our
caring relationship with our world is not a cognitive one but is manifested through moods.
And these moods, which define how we respond to our World, derive from what Heidegger
refers to as our attunement, or thrownness. Our past experiences attune us, or throw us, in
certain ways and the consequent mood with which we relate to our World defines the nature
of that relationship: "Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the
attunement of a state-of-mind" (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]: 176). This attunement does not
derive only from our first-hand personal experiences but also from absorbing the ideas and
values that permeate our generation. Thus, "[Dasein] is its past, whether explicitly or not ...
its own past – and this always means the past of its 'generation' – is not something which
follows along after Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it" (ibid: 41).

The way in which our past defines the nature of our Being-in-the-World should not,
however, obscure the significance of our future. For, just as our Being-in-the-World is
temporally defined in relation to our past, it is also defined in relationship to our
understanding of our future potentials: in Heidegger's terms, not only are we thrown, but
we are also throwers. Dasein and its Being-in-the-World cannot be conceived in terms of a
fixed present that is the outcome of attunement. It must also be conceived in relation to the
totality of its "disclosive potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]: 183). We define
ourselves and our relationship with our World in terms of potentials that are important to
us, so the way in which our past attunes us is structured by our understanding of our future
potentiality. Equally, that understanding of our future potentiality is attuned by our past
experiences and by absorption of the experiences and values of our generation. Present,
past and future must therefore be conceived not as separate instances of a linear progression but in terms of dialectic interrelatedness: each temporal dimension is impacted by the other temporal dimensions while, at the same time, each impacts upon the others.

The third existential characteristic of Dasein’s Being-in-the-World is that Dasein is in-the-World with other Dasein. So our world of signification is not encountered in a solitary fashion; it is an intersubjective endeavour. And this sharing of the world is not just a contingent, ontic event; it is a fundamental aspect of our ontological Being: Being-with

is an existential statement as to [Dasein’s] essence. Even if the particular factual Dasein does not turn to others, and supposes that it has no need for them or manages to get along without them, it is in the way of Being-with (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]: 160).

Furthermore, our intersubjective situation entails a mutual engagement of worlds of signification within which all parties have significance for one another; that is, those third person, “other” Dasein who we encounter are in-the-world just as the first person “I” Dasein is in-the-world; just as “I” care so do “they” care: “they are not encountered as person-things present-at-hand: we meet them ‘at work’, that is primarily in their Being-in-the-World” (ibid: 156).

The key points that I take from this reading of Heidegger are that each person’s being can be conceived in terms of three existential characteristics. The first characteristic is that we cannot relate to our respective worlds from an attitude of detached neutrality. The way in which each person perceives their own world is inevitably shaped by their respective projects and preoccupations: as Heidegger would put it, we cannot Be-in-the-World other than with an attitude of care for that World; and that attitude of care will shape our understanding of that World.

The second ineluctable characteristic of being is that it must be understood in terms of its dialectical interrelatedness with its past-facing attunement and its future-facing understanding of its potentialities. Although we are shaped by our past experiences and the experiences of our generation, the way in which we receive and respond to those experiences is shaped, in turn, by our future projects. And these, in turn, are shaped by our past experiences, and so on. We therefore stand as if between two interfacing mirrors: one of which represents our past; the other our future. We cannot look into our future without seeing the reflection of our past; and we cannot look into our past without seeing the reflection of our future.
The third inescapable characteristic of each person’s being to which Heidegger draws our attention is its intersubjective quality: we find ourselves living in the same world as other people. Even if we choose to lead a solitary existence, avoiding contact with these others, their presence nevertheless shapes our relationship with our world. And just as my relationship with my world is shaped by my projects and preoccupations, so is every other person’s shaped by the nature of their respective “care”. Furthermore, each of these other people is just as subject to their own dialectical, temporal embeddedness as I am.

Whereas Heidegger’s conclusions flow from his exploration of the nature of Being, Sartre’s proceed from his elaboration of the nature of consciousness (2003 [1943]). According to Sartre, human subjectivity must be understood in relation to consciousness, for consciousness is human subjectivity. But like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Sartre rejects the Cartesian understanding of a detached subjective “mind” which looks out dispassionately on an objective world of present-at-hand entities. Sartre focuses on the emptiness of subjectivity: for Sartre, consciousness, in itself, is nothing; it only takes on substance in relation to its intentional object. In Sartre’s terms, the for-itself (consciousness) takes on form through the in-itself entities of which it is conscious. And just as consciousness only takes on substance through its relationship with the in-itself, those in-itself entities are nothing but featureless matter until given form by consciousness; by the for-itself. Sartre thus concludes the ineluctable autonomy of the subject: since meaning is comprised of a dialectical interplay between the in-itself (which is given shape and meaning by the for-itself) and the for-itself (which is, in-itself, nothing) freedom of choice in attributing meaning is absolute.

Despite the autonomy that is entailed in this relationship between the in-itself and the for-itself, Sartre emphasises the extent to which we are nevertheless impacted by the facticity of our situation. We do not choose what we are and what our position in the world is; these are given to us by the facticity that is the outcome of our past. However, we are free to choose how we respond to facticity. Facticity provides reasons for us to act in a certain way but, as far as Sartre is concerned, we choose whether those reasons for action should become causes of action. Even our biological and psychological makeup, our place in society or whatever else may be regarded as causal in our choices are only causal if we choose to make them so: they are reasons that become causes through an act of choice on our part. We are thus, as Sartre puts it, “condemned to be free” (1973 [1946]: 34): we cannot escape being makers of choices.
Heidegger and Sartre develop the notion of inauthenticity, or bad faith, to describe denial of the true nature of our autonomy and our capacity for personal engagement. Inauthenticity has two faces. For Heidegger, the first face of inauthenticity consists of overlooking the predisposed nature of our care for our World, denying our attunement and repudiating our intersubjective context. Inauthenticity is to regard the subject as standing apart from the dialectically constituted ontological, temporal and social processes through which it constructs its reality. Inauthentic people thus assume that they can construct the nature of their Being-in-the-World without reference to the forces that have defined each moment of that process of construction. They imagine that the construction of their reality is an act of unilateral, rather than dialectical, signification. They pretend a mood-less neutrality, disregarding the attunement, or thrownness, which inevitably determines the way in which they interact with their situation. Furthermore, they assume that they can stand apart from their intersubjective context. They fail to acknowledge that even those who pursue a life of reclusive, self-sufficiency cannot escape the actuality of Dasein's intersubjectivity, for even a person's avoidance of others is premised upon acknowledgement of co-presence.

For Sartre, too, the avoidance of bad faith requires reconciliation with those features which comprise the inescapable facticity of one's context. Features such as one's past, one's class, one's nationality, one's social experiences, one's gender and one's physical make up. To deny facticity is to repudiate the past; a past which constitutes the resistance against which one's future choices are made.

Despite the temptations of this first mode of inauthenticity/bad faith, it is to its second face that both Heidegger and Sartre believe that we are more likely to succumb. For Heidegger, this is to deny our capacity for choice: to suppose that the World in which we live is constituted independently of our own signification of it; to deny that our attunement is shaped by our own understanding of our potentiality for Being and to overlook our agentic capacity in the face of intersubjectivity. Of particular concern to Heidegger are the temptations of falling, averageness and disburdening. Falling refers to non-reflectively going where we are thrown; permitting the momentum of our attunement to carry us as unreflectively where it may lead. Heidegger notes that we are inclined to use the routines and superficialities of everyday situations as props to avoid committing ourselves to clear choices about who we are and what we are doing. Falling thus ignores the essential interrelatedness of our temporality; it acknowledges that we are thrown whilst failing to acknowledge that we are also throwers.
Averageness, for Heidegger, is the tendency of Dasein to lose its identity in intersubjectivity. Thus, in Dasein's everyday Being-with-others, its Being is taken away by those others: "This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others' ... In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded" (1962 [1926]: 164). The consequence is that Dasein comes to think of itself not as "I" but as part of "they" and its actions are largely dictated by what is expected of that common togetherness. Heidegger describes this loss of individuality as a disburdening of individual responsibility: "the particular Dasein in its everydayness is disburdened by the 'they'. Not only that; by thus disburdening it of its Being, the 'they' accommodates Dasein if Dasein has a tendency to take things easy and make them easy" (ibid: 165). So disburdening is a tempting cop-out of one's individual, agentic capacity, and as a consequence the individual is further emasculated as "the 'they' retains and enhances its stubborn dominion" (ibid: 165).

For Sartre, this second face of bad faith comprises the assumption of passivity in the face of facticity. Sartre stresses that, although we are impacted by features of our social, hereditary, physical and intellectual circumstances, we are nevertheless free to interpret and respond to these features; to "transcend" facticity: "The basic concept which is thus engendered, utilises the double property of the human being, who is at once a facticity and a transcendence" (2003 [1943]: 79). To deny one's transcendence is to objectify oneself; a futile attempt by the for-itself to identify itself as some form of in-itself which it can move towards but which it can never become.

Sartre refers to one manifestation of this second face of bad faith as sincerity. Sincerity is the belief that one must come to terms with "what one is". This is the error of seeking to be one's "true" self; the assumption that one has an essence that cannot be transcended by free choice. Such sincerity is bad faith because, for Sartre, we have no true self; no essence. To adopt a Sartrean phraseology: "we are not what we are". In other words, even though our past determines our facticity, which may be everything that defines us, we are nevertheless free to transcend this facticity towards the future. Authenticity is the acknowledgement of this: our abjuration of any essence; our recognition of our autonomy to respond as we choose to our facticity; our freedom to be what we choose to be, not what we are. Sincerity, on the other hand, is a cunning project that seeks to avoid taking responsibility for one's self.

Heidegger and Sartre introduce the notions of anxiety and anguish to describe different aspects of our response to the ineluctable autonomy of our situation. According to
Heidegger, anxiety is the emotion that attends realisation of the inadequacies of the inauthentic mode of Being. For Sartre, anguish is a response to the vertigo-inducing realisation of our own autonomy. It is the motivating force which evokes our flight towards the second face of bad faith; towards sincerity. Faced with the terrifying realisation that we are nothing except that which we choose to be, that we have no essence other than that which we construct for ourselves, we are racked by anguish.

The opposite of inauthenticity and bad faith is authenticity. If the former comprise the abrogation of our free choice or the denial of facticity, authenticity involves coming to terms with both the facticity and attunement of our past and the transcendent potentialities of our future. Sartre is particularly explicit in his endorsement of authenticity and autonomy. These themes pervade his literary and philosophical works and their moral implication is nowhere more clearly stated than in the advice he gives to a student whose agonised prevarication he recounts in *Existentialism and Humanism*: “you are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent” (Sartre, 1973 [1946]: 38). For Sartre, authenticity can be understood as a form of enlightenment. It represents a realisation of our transcendent freedom and a coming to terms with the anguish that this presents. Authenticity is not a once and for all achievement though, for to suppose that one has now come to terms with ones freedom and that one is now an authentic person would be yet another manifestation of bad faith. Authenticity confronts the ever-present freedom to slip into bad faith and deny ones freedom: we can always choose not to choose. It thus requires continual renewal and constant re-affirmation. Authenticity is not an achievement; it is a never-ending project.

**Sartre's Look and Heidegger's Authentic Solicitude: Contrasting Analyses of Intersubjectivity**

Despite their agreement on the autonomy of the individual and the nature of authentic being, a topic about which the writings of Sartre and Heidegger point in rather different directions is that of interpersonal relationships. Sartre, at least in his earlier work, focuses on the conflictual quality of intersubjectivity, dwelling on the challenge that one person’s authenticity necessarily presents to the creative autonomy of other people. Heidegger, on the other hand, describes contrasting types of interpersonal relationship. Although certain forms of interaction have the potential to suppress the autonomy of individuals, Heidegger also envisages relationships in which the authenticity of one person can actually be enabled and encouraged by another person. He thus leaves space for the possibility of mutually

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12 The conflictual intersubjective implications of Sartre's existentialism may account for the later dilution of his existentialist commitment in favour of a more Marxian-oriented political stance.
authentic co-existence. I will briefly review Sartre's perspective before outlining Heidegger's more optimistic stance.

Sartre introduces the notion of the *Look* to draw attention to the potentially conflictual quality of intersubjectivity and to account for the destructive turn which many interpersonal relationships take. The reason for this conflictual quality is that intersubjectivity necessarily entails challenge to each person's creative autonomy. Sartre (2003 [1943]) offers an account of one person encountering another in a park to illustrate this intersubjective tension. I may be sitting on a park bench, quietly contemplating my surroundings, alone in my situation. All of a sudden, I become aware of the presence of another person in the park. That person may present no physical threat and may make no attempt to engage with me. Nevertheless, my awareness of their presence immediately changes my situation: instead of being the only "for-itself" entity amongst a field of "in-itself entities", my "for-itself-ness", or my subjectivity, is now shared with another. I am no longer a subject surrounded by a world of objects; another subject is present. My awareness of that subject's presence inevitably challenges my authorship of my world. Of course, the other undergoes the same process, at which point a struggle for centrality and ownership of our (now) shared world ensues. I can only get back my world if I can reduce that person to an in-itself entity within it and they likewise for me. So I inevitably embark on the fruitless process of trying to reduce them in this way; fruitless insofar as they are, and cannot be other than, "for-themselves": despite both of our efforts to objectify the other, each of us cannot but be a subject. We thus derive the significance of the Look of another person. It lies not in the impact of the eyes but in my awareness that my subjective autonomy is threatened by the gaze of another.

In contrast to the conflictual analysis of intersubjectivity presented by Sartre, Heidegger offers the possibility of a more harmonious co-existence with fellow Dasein. As I pointed out earlier, one of the key characteristics of Being, for Heidegger, is "Being with" other people. Heidegger proposes that this intersubjective quality of Being is not an ontical contingency; it is an existential necessity. So, one person cannot conceive of their world other than as incorporating other people: "even if the particular factual Dasein does not turn to others, and supposes that it has no need for them or manages to get along without them "it is in the way of Being-with" (ibid, 1962 [1926]: 160). Thus far Heidegger is on similar ground to Sartre: for Sartre, too, intersubjectivity is inescapable: we are "condemned" to be with others. But whereas, for Sartre, "hell is other people" (*In Camera*, cited in Danto, 1975: 106), Heidegger envisages the possibility of benign co-existence.
I have already drawn attention to Heidegger's observation that our relationships with other people differ from relationships with impersonal objects insofar as other people, unlike impersonal objects, have, like us, their own worlds of signification; worlds of signification of which other people, including us, are part: “Being-in is Being-with Others [and] Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is Dasein-with” (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]: 155). Therefore, as Polt (1999) points out, each person's encounter with other people comprises a mutual engagement of worlds of signification, within which both parties have significance for one another. Again, Heidegger is on shared ground with Sartre: whereas Sartre describes a subject as a “for itself” entity who, through interpersonal contact, encounters other “for themselves” entities, Heidegger describes meetings of the separate worlds of signification that necessarily characterise separate Dasein. The difference between Sartre and Heidegger, though, lies in Heidegger's presentation of contrasting attitudes that one Dasein, or one subject, may adopt towards another.

The nature of “care” or “concern” which characterises this intersubjective relationship with other Dasein is referred to by Heidegger as solicitude. And Heidegger differentiates two extreme kinds of solicitude: an inauthentic mode and an authentic mode; “one which leaps in and dominates and one which leaps forth and liberates” (1962 [1926]: 159). Inauthentic solicitude would occur if one Dasein were to take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position of concern: it can leap in for him. This kind of solicitude takes over from the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely. (ibid, 1962 [1926]: 158).

Now, inauthentic solicitude is not presented by Heidegger as a necessarily vindictive endeavour. For one person's solicitude towards another to be described as inauthentic need not imply malevolent intent. Indeed, Heidegger’s depiction of inauthentic solicitude seems as apposite to altruistic paternalism as it is to self-interested domination. Any negative quality derives not from a presupposition of manipulative or exploitative intent but from the suppression of the other's agency.

In contrast to this inauthentic extreme is the other, authentic extreme of solicitude; a relationship that is facilitative, rather than suppressive, of agency. For Heidegger, authentic solicitude comprises:
Heidegger thus presents as authentic solicitude as an interpersonal relationship in which one party enables authenticity in the other; a relationship in which one helps the other to come to terms with their autonomy. Whereas inauthentic solicitude is suppressive of agency, authentic solicitude has a liberating quality: it puts the other in touch with their own authenticity.

For Heidegger, then, Being necessarily involves Being-with others and it would be inauthentic of us to repudiate the influence that those others have on our self understanding. Furthermore, Heidegger proposes that we are prone to respond to this interdependence in an overly dependent manner: to “disburden” our agentic potentiality; to “fall” in the direction taken by others rather than self-reflexively asserting our own autonomy; to lose ourselves in “average-ness”. Given the lure of this “dictatorship of the ‘they’” (Heidegger, 1962 [1926]: 164), we are more amenable to inauthentic solicitude on the part of other people than we are to authentic solicitude. However, this need not be the case. Although inauthentic solicitude is the easier and more attractive option, the capacity resides within each of us to grasp our own agency. Furthermore, the capacity also lies within each of us to adopt an attitude of authentic, rather than inauthentic solicitude towards others, thus putting them in touch with their own authenticity rather than, out of either repressive malignance or paternalistic care for their interests, stepping in to undermine their agency.

Now, in describing the place that Heidegger holds out for an authentically facilitative form of intersubjective relationship I am not imputing to him approbation of it. Despite his apparent commendation of authenticity, Heidegger’s is not an explicitly ethical undertaking: he is more concerned with the ontological nature of Being than with normative ethics. Indeed, unlike Sartre, who “condemns and approves with the confidence of a pope” (Danto, 1975: 144), Heidegger adopts a notably non-prescriptive stance. Nevertheless, in drawing attention to the facilitative potential of intersubjective relationships, Heidegger points towards an alternative to the necessarily conflictual picture painted by Sartre. He therefore offers part of the foundation upon which his one time protégée, Jürgen
Habermas\textsuperscript{13}, builds the systematic valorisation of intersubjective ethics that I will review in the next chapter\textsuperscript{14}.

**Concluding Comments**

Existentialism's stark message for leaders is that there are no universally valid principles against which they can measure the moral probity of their actions and decisions. Morality is not a matter of conformity to principles; it is a matter of individual commitment. Therefore, leaders who wish to follow a moral course of action must do without external guidance; they must come to terms with their own moral authorship. However, this does not entail amoralism. Nor does it validate moral egotism. Just because conventionally prescribed, moral principles can offer no irrefutable guidance for organizational leadership it does not follow that organizations are morality-free zones. Nor does existentialism legitimise the unbridled pursuit of self-interest by those in charge. Existentialism does not invalidate the notion of morality; it simply places the onus of moral authorship fairly and squarely on the shoulders of agent. Applied to the domain of leadership, existentialism would call upon leaders to acknowledge this responsibility; to grasp the moral freedom that it entails and to continually reaffirm their own freedom by making and remaking choices.

Existentialism's preoccupation with authenticity holds some particularly important implications for organizational leadership. To follow Heidegger's and Sartre's injunction, leaders need to come to terms with their relationship of mutual signification with their context. They must acknowledge that the facticity of their situation provides their being with significance but that they are nevertheless free to interpret and attribute meaning to the detail of that situation. They may have compelling reasons for acting in certain ways, but it is up to them to decide whether or not these *reasons for* action should become *causes of* action.

On the one hand, leaders must concede their "thrownness"; their "attunement"; their "facticity": that their outlook on the world and their responses to that outlook are partly

\textsuperscript{13} Although Habermas was a student of Heidegger's their association became strained and eventually ended as a consequence of Habermas's despair at his former mentor's failure to repudiate his acquiescence to Nazi rule in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s (Matustik, 2001).

\textsuperscript{14} Emmanuel Levinas also presents an understanding of intersubjectivity which differs markedly from that of Sartre. According to Bauman (1993), Levinas not only locates the roots of the moral sense in encounters with the "face" of the "other"; he also understands that we only achieve true selfhood through such encounters. For Levinas, "the self may be born only out of union. It is through stretching myself towards the other that I have become the unique, the only, the irreplaceable self that I am" (Bauman, 1993: 77).
shaped by their prior experiences and the experiences of the community of which they are part. For those who lead within business organizations, the expectations of managerialist performativity may figure prominently in that facticity. Their agendas are likely to be significantly shaped by the conventions of the business context and by the associated expectations of their social and professional peers. Furthermore, they cannot overlook the extent to which their own material circumstances, along with those of their dependents, are tied in with conformity to those conventions. Those who lead in alternative organizational contexts may be less securely shakled to the imperatives of capitalist enterprise, but their outlooks will nevertheless be influenced by the preoccupations of those people who shape their respective organizational agendas. Both Sartre and Heidegger alert us to the need to acknowledge these influences; this facticity of our situation. To do otherwise would not only be inauthentic; it would also be unrealistic. Furthermore, reflection on their facticity may also serve an important supplementary purpose for leaders: it may illuminate for them the extent to which their own thought processes, priorities and judgements are shaped by the circles within which they live and work.

On the other hand, if leaders are to avoid Heideggerian inauthenticity or Sartrean bad faith then, as well as acknowledging the facticity of their circumstances, they must also grasp their agentic capacity to interpret, to respond to and to transcend that facticity in relation to their future potentialities for being. The material and social circumstances that characterise their role and their profession may shape their leadership agendas but they are always free to choose how they respond to those influences. So, although the economic realities of capitalist enterprise may shape the agendas of business leaders, moral choices are still theirs to make. They and only they are accountable for those choices and for their consequences. Similarly, leaders in the public and charitable sectors may be subjected to the broader imperatives that characterise their organizational contexts, but their responses to those imperatives are no more pre-determined than those of business leaders. Other, more powerful actors may disagree with and negate the choices that leaders make. Leaders’ moral agendas may thus be frustrated. In extreme circumstances, fealty to their moral commitments may even undermine leaders’ job tenure or their career prospects. Nevertheless, those moral choices are still the leader’s to make.

Phrases such as “I had no choice” or “I had to do what was expected of me” therefore have no place in existentialist ethics. For Heidegger, such phases would be manifestations of “disburdening” and of “averageness”; of renouncing ones agentic capacity for autonomy; of
blending in with one's intersubjective context. For Sartre they would represent "bad faith"; an anguished denial of one's irrevocable moral autonomy. Existentially moral leaders are those who take responsibility for their decisions. They make decisions in response to the depth of their moral commitment; not in response to the expectations of their role. They accord with Nietzsche's depiction of a Zarathustran super person whose sense of moral ownership acknowledges only the "mighty sage", the "unknown commander" that is self (Nietzsche, 2003 [1885]: 62).

I have discussed so far how existentialism venerates commitment and choice in leaders. However, leadership necessarily involves a relationship with followers and if commitment and authenticity on the part of the leader are to be accorded value, then so must they be desirable on the part of those who are led. Kierkegaard draws attention to the self-affirming quality of choice: its quality lies not in the nature of its outcomes but in the commitment with which it is made. And if committed choice has inherent value, that inherent value must pertain as much to choices made by followers as to choices made by leaders. The emphasis that Heidegger and Sartre's place on authenticity must surely apply as much to followers as it does to leaders: if moral leadership calls upon leaders to come to terms with their own autonomy, it must also call upon them to put followers in touch with their autonomy. In Heideggerian terminology, if leaders are to avoid "disburdening" their own agentic capacity, they should also respect the need for followers to avoid blending into the "averageness" of their intersubjective context.

Existentialist analysis of moral leadership must therefore take into account the extent to which leaders enable committed moral choices and facilitate authenticity in those who they lead. Different existentialist perspectives would entail contrasting responses to this requirement. Nietzsche's elitist and deterministic appraisal implies that those exceptionally gifted "super men", whose privileged talents and whose realisation of their own superior capability stands them apart from the common herd, should assert themselves over "lower types" in order to evoke the flourishing of humanity. Nietzsche would have no truck for the notion of super men facilitating authenticity in lesser mortals. However, this is not the conclusion towards which Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre push us. Unlike Nietzsche's deterministic elitism, these other existentialist contributions are incompatible with psychological or physiological determinism. Although our circumstances may be shaped by our facticity, we are nevertheless free to choose how we respond to that facticity; in effect,

15 Heidegger's widely criticised, wartime "silence", during which he declined to object to Nazi policies and was promoted to the senior academic role vacated by the removal of his Jewish erstwhile mentor, Edmund Husserl, might be interpreted as an instance of his own disburdening of agentic responsibility.
to choose what we are. And if coming to terms with our own autonomy is to be valued, there seems to be no basis, unless we accept Nietzsche’s elitist exclusionism, for us not to place similar worth in evocation of authenticity in all other people. This, then, seems to be a key existentialist criterion of moral leadership: that the leader encourages followers to grasp their own moral autonomy, thus facilitating authenticity and the avoidance of bad faith in those followers. Existentialist leadership, then, has decidedly facilitative connotations.

Now, here we confront a difficulty, because contested moral authorship presents a possible terrain of conflict amongst followers and between leaders and followers. Indeed, for Sartre, intersubjective tension is unavoidable. Whereas Heidegger warns of the dangers of “averageness” but nevertheless leaves space for authentic intersubjective relationships, intersubjectivity for Sartre involves an inevitable battle of wills: each “for-itself” will inevitably seek to reduce all other “for-themselves” to “in-itself” status; each subject will inevitably seek to objectify other subjects. And just as each seeks to objectify others; her or his own subjectivity is challenged by the subjectivity of those others. The presence of other “for-themselves” will necessarily challenge each and every “for-itself-ness”, seeking to make of it an “in-itself”. Intersubjective engagement thus entails, for Sartre, confrontation between competing authorships; confrontation from which the only escape is inauthenticity in all but one of the parties.

If we adopt the Sartrean analysis then, leader-follower relationships will necessarily involve tension between the autonomy of the leader and that of followers. In order to achieve authenticity, leaders must necessarily impose their own autonomy, their own version of moral truth, over the competing versions of their followers. Successful leadership cannot be a facilitative endeavour: it can only result in the suppression of followers’ authenticity. Sartre thus points towards an unfortunately Nietzschean impasse. Given Sartre’s conflictual analysis of intersubjectivity, a battle of Nietzschean Wills to Power seems the most likely scenario; a battle in which successful leaders will be those who succeed in impressing their autonomy as moral authors over and above the autonomy of their followers. Only thus can they preserve their authenticity: the authenticity of followers must necessarily be sacrificed to that of the leader.

Heidegger, on the other hand, points towards a way out of this impositional impasse. By drawing a distinction between authentic solicitude, which facilitates agency, and inauthentic solicitude, which suppresses it, Heidegger leaves room for leaders to realise their own authenticity whilst also enabling authenticity in those who they lead. Whereas inauthentic solicitude, undertaken either in the interests of benevolent paternalism or dictatorial
repression, is necessarily emasculatory, authentic solicitude offers a template for empowerment. It is this model of facilitative leadership that I will develop in more detail during the course of next chapter.
3.3 INTERSUBJECTIVIST ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

Intersubjectivist theory offers a basis for evaluating leadership ethics that differs from both of those considered so far. Principle-based ethics seeks to identify universally valid foundations of moral legitimacy, while existentialism proposes that no such basis can exist and that each individual is the author of his or her own standards of moral rightness. While the former tends towards an objectivist meta-ethic, the latter offers a basis for relativism. Intersubjectivist ethics, on the other hand, is neither objectivist nor relativist: it holds that moral probity does not comprise correspondence with objectively existing standards but neither is it a matter of individual construction on the part of the agent. According to the intersubjectivist position that I will elaborate here\(^\text{16}\), moral rightness is created and sustained through processes of ongoing dialogue. A moral leader, according to this particular intersubjectivist position, would thus be a person who facilitates and responds to the outcomes of such dialogical processes.

In presenting this third ontological possibility, proponents of intersubjectivist ethics challenge the assertion that the dualism of objectivism and relativism exhausts the range of meta-ethical options. This limited, dualistic understanding, according to Alasdair MacIntyre (1985 [1981]), is manifested by the slide into emotivism which succeeded what he refers to as the Failure of the Enlightenment Project. MacIntyre describes how, in response to the quest for rationally apprehended, objective standards which characterises modernity, Enlightenment philosophers sought to identify universally-applicable moral rules by which human behaviour could be judged. Failure to reach consensus on such objective ethical standards drove later theorists to take recourse in relativist philosophies such as existentialism. It seemed to these commentators that, since there can be no objective standards of right and wrong, moral legitimacy can only reside in the subjective commitment of each individual. It was assumed that either ethical objectivity exists, so human behaviour can be evaluated in accordance with conformity to its standards, or that all moral evaluation is a matter of individual judgement. This analysis overlooks the third ontological possibility, which underpins the intersubjectivist stance: that the ethical legitimacy of actions, states of affairs and decisions derives from the nature of the processes by which they are brought about.

\(^{16}\) Habermas is by no means the only person to propose an intersubjectivist ethic and, in focusing on his work, I will either exclude or only make peripheral reference to a range of alternative perspectives. In concentrating on Habermas's work, I am not necessarily inferring its superiority over these other stances; just that it offers a comprehensive, systematic and particularly compelling rationale.
In order to elaborate an intersubjectivist stance, I will begin by reflecting on how virtue ethics points us in the direction of intersubjectivist theory. I will then describe how Jürgen Habermas, in his discussion of social theory (1987 [1968]; 1974 [1963], communication (1979 [1976]; 1984 [1981]; 1987 [1981]) and discourse ethics (1990 [1983]; 2001 [1994]), develops aspects of the Aristotelian tradition upon which virtue theory is premised in order to present some processual conditions to which discursive engagement needs to conform in order to provide a source of moral legitimacy.

Virtue Ethics: Pointing the Way towards Intersubjectivism

Virtue ethics theory proposes that the moral probity of our actions can be judged in relation to their conformity to the standards of virtue that prevail within our community. Stated as simply as that, virtue theory seems to offer a relativist analysis of morality. If morality is to be judged purely in relation to the ethical norms that are accepted within a particular community, then surely this pushes us towards the Nietzschean understanding that I reviewed in the last chapter. However, virtue ethicists avoid the slide into cultural relativism by emphasising certain characteristics of communities whose value systems are thus accorded moral legitimacy. Those characteristics feature prominently in the descriptions of virtue offered by Aristotle (1999 [334-322BC]), the writer whose moral and political philosophy has inspired contemporary virtue theory. As far as Aristotle was concerned, moral behaviour is behaviour which conforms to the virtuous standards of the community within which he lived. That community was the Ancient Greek city-state of Athens. And the characteristic of Athens in the 4th century BC which, for Aristotle, lent moral legitimacy to its standards of virtue was the involvement of its citizens in the key decisions which affected them. For the Athenian political system comprised a type of direct democracy in which the citizens regularly met to discuss and decide on how the city-state was to be run.

Aristotle considered our capacity to participate in direct democratic processes to be a defining characteristic of humanity. He believed that this capacity for political participation distinguishes us from other sentient creatures and thus offers a foundation for the attribution

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17 Although Aristotle was originally from Macedonia and spent an extended period in his home state as personal tutor to the young Alexander, he studied and taught philosophy in Athens. Athens clearly had a significant impact on his political and moral philosophy.

18 The democratic purity of ancient Athenian politics was partly undermined by the exclusion of women from the political process and by its institutional dependency on slavery — slaves were also excluded from political decision making. Nevertheless, Aristotle's restricted definition of citizenship should not divert attention from the overriding principle of his political and moral philosophy: that all citizens should be included in decision making that affected them.
of moral probity. However, it is important to note that Aristotle does not attribute the morally legitimising force of direct democracy to its efficacy in identifying moral outcomes. If this were his stance, he would be adopting an objectivist perspective: he would be assuming that there is an objectively “right way” and that direct democracy is the most effective way of identifying that right way. But this is not Aristotle’s position. For Aristotle, the fact that an issue has been decided upon by all those who it affects confers moral legitimacy on its outcome. Direct democracy is not a means of identifying moral probity; it is a means of conferring moral probity.

More recently, Alasdair MacIntyre (1985 [1981], 1988), virtue theory’s most influential contemporary advocate, has suggested that the standards of virtue that prevail within a community, or “tradition”, are partly legitimised by the extent to which that tradition is open to engagement with the competing moral perspectives of other traditions. MacIntyre (1988) is particularly keen to emphasise the importance of imaginative engagement. He points out that merely listening to other people’s views may not provide an adequate basis for understanding those views. In order to really understand other people, we need to try to “get inside” their perspective; to make a proactive effort to see things on their terms rather than on our terms.

In the writing of Aristotle and MacIntyre, then, discourse is offered as a foundation of moral legitimacy. Both writers propose that the moral legitimacy of the standards of virtue that prevail within a particular community of thought derives from the extent to which that community of thought is prepared to critically reflect on its moral agenda and to open its moral perspective to imaginative engagement with alternative, competing perspectives. Although not generally identified with virtue theory, Habermas (1979 [1976]; 1984 [1981]; 1987 [1981]; 1990 [1983]; 2001 [1994]) follows the Aristotelian lead, offering a systematic philosophical justification for intersubjectivist ethics and also spelling out some of the procedural conditions to which discourse would need to conform in order to confer moral legitimacy on its outcomes.

19 Virtue theory, as interpreted by MacIntyre, has a great deal more than this to say about business ethics. Other notable insights are MacIntyre’s Weberian-influenced critique of the amoralism that pervades management thought, to which I will refer in my concluding chapter, and his distinction between practices and institutions in relation to business. These are elaborated by Beadle and Moore (2006). Furthermore, Robert Solomon (1993) illuminates the benefits of considering business and virtue through the Aristotelian lens of telos, or purpose. For the present undertaking, though, I consider Aristotle and MacIntyre’s common focus on dialogue to be virtue theory’s most significant contribution.

20 Indeed, although he acknowledges his own debt to Aristotle, Habermas is quite critical of some branches of what he refers to as “neo-Aristotelianism”, particularly those which co-opt Aristotelian theory to support conservative agendas.
A Normative Role for Social Theory

One of Habermas's early preoccupations (1987 [1968]; 1974 [1963]) was to establish a normative role for social theory and to define a form of rationality that is apposite to the fulfilment of that role. He thus sought to augment the positivist rationality that pervades the knowledge domain of natural science and the hermeneutic rationality that he considers apposite to the domain of social science. For Habermas, normative social theory is concerned with critical-emancipatory knowledge. Its task is critical reflection. It seeks to go beyond control and interpretation in order to carry out a normative role. Its aim is not just to chart the nature of existing states but to "determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed" (1987 [1968]: 310). Habermas thus follows in the tradition of critical theory, which draws upon writers such as Kant and Hegel, Marx and Weber, and which includes the theorists of the Frankfurt School, in seeking to establish a social theory which goes beyond the realms of positivist science and hermeneutic enquiry.

For Habermas, the validity of truths within the domain of critical-emancipatory knowledge derives from their efficacy in meeting the needs that pertain within that domain: he describes those needs as "progress toward the autonomy of the individual, with the elimination of suffering and the furthering of concrete happiness" (1974 [1963]) 254). This is a conception of truth which "does not improve the manipulation of things and of reifications, but which instead advances the interest of reason in human adulthood, in the autonomy of action and in the liberation from dogmatism" (ibid; 256). Habermas's critical social theory thus shares a common agenda with social and political philosophy: critical social science "is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest. Critically oriented sciences share this interest with philosophy" (1987 [1968]: 310). In particular, critical social theory treads the same ground as applied moral philosophy in exploring the normative legitimacy of political and social structures and in seeking to loosen the constraints which inhibit progress along the path towards human enlightenment.

Habermas is aware that the viability of a critical social theory is dependent upon some basis of rationality by which the truths that it reveals can be validated. This is problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, the pervasive influence of empirical-analytic, natural scientific method has led to an expectation that all forms of knowledge be amenable to positivistic
verification. Since positivistic verification is unattainable in relation to critical-emancipatory knowledge, the very possibility of such knowledge is cast into doubt.

On the other hand, the possibility of critical-emancipatory knowledge is also under attack from the terrain of historical-hermeneutic social science. This is because the hermeneutic agenda seems incompatible with the notion of normative critique. A key supposition of the hermeneutic endeavour is that, in order to understand a person's reasons for acting, we must be able to identify with those reasons: "only to the extent to which the interpreter also grasps the reasons why the author's utterances seem rational to the author himself does he understand what the author meant" (1990 [1983]: 30). Now, presumably, all agents have reasons to act that are legitimate to them, so if we have truly understood their reasons for acting we must have got inside these conditions of legitimacy. Therefore, "there is a sense in which any interpretation is a rational interpretation" (ibid: 31). Hermeneutic success seems, then, to preclude rational critique, leaving us to conclude that a hermeneutic undertaking necessarily commits us to a relativist conception of rationality.

Therefore, a key task facing Habermas is to counter, on the one hand, positivist calls for critical-emancipatory propositions to conform to the same criteria of rationality as empirical-analytic knowledge. This is the notion of rationality that underpins Enlightenment moral philosophy's absolutist agenda; an endeavour which Habermas believes is doomed to failure. On the other hand, he must counter the methodological expectations of the historical-hermeneutic domain, which entail that all forms of rationality must necessarily be culturally and historically relative. This is the understanding which, he believes has resulted in meta-ethical stances such as that of existentialism. Contrary to the implications of empirical-analytic and historical-hermeneutic methodology, Habermas sets out to demonstrate the existence of a critical rationality which can claim universal legitimacy whilst avoiding objectivist pretensions; a critical rationality which will permit us to declare that, although a person has reasons to act, these reasons may not be rational from a critical-emancipatory perspective.

Importantly, Habermas's project is not to refute the legitimacy of positivist and hermeneutic rationality in relation to their respective knowledge domains, for he considers each to be pragmatically apposite to the realisation of those human needs that it seeks to satisfy. It is, rather, to establish the legitimacy of an alternative form of rationality that is apposite to the domain of critical-emancipatory knowledge. As Thomas McCarthy (1984) puts it, he thus hopes to provide the basis for redirection, rather than abandonment, of the project of modernity. Habermas takes a far more positive view of modernity and the Enlightenment
than do some of his Frankfurt School predecessors (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997 [1944]). He applauds the achievements of empirical-analytic knowledge over the last few centuries as well as the more recent developments in historical-hermeneutic method. Furthermore, although he believes that the pathway to even greater enlightenment lies in carving out a separate terrain for critical-emancipatory rationality, the establishment of this separate terrain can benefit from selective appropriation from the empirical-analytic and historical-hermeneutic knowledge domains. Just as the methodological presuppositions of those domains can deflect from the achievement of critical-emancipatory knowledge, so can they contribute to it.

In the empirical-analytic world of natural science, Habermas observes that attributions of scientific truth entail a tacit assumption of rational consensus amongst a scientific community. In other words, for a proposition to be considered as scientifically true within a community, it is assumed that this proposition would be agreed to by all members of that community who are in possession of all relevant information and who are driven only by a quest for understanding. Habermas appropriates this idea that unforced, rational consensus offers a basis for attributions of "truth". He applies it in order to define those processual conditions which constitute the basis for critical-emancipatory legitimacy. Furthermore, since the attribution of scientific truth implies liberation from the dogmas and cultural prejudices which threaten to undermine rational consensus, it offers a methodological precedent for a critical social theory which sets out to clear a pathway towards enlightenment by dismantling those ideological barriers which impede it.

As far as the historical-hermeneutic domain goes, hermeneutic understanding can only be achieved through dialectical interplay between the interpreter and that which is interpreted: the interpreter constitutes meaning and is in turn constituted by that meaning, so that interpreter and interpreted confront one another in the manner of interfacing mirrors. This process of dialectical creation of meaning presents a template for the dialogical establishment of shared normative understanding by which, according to Habermas, critical-emancipatory knowledge is legitimised. Most importantly, the historical-hermeneutic focus on understanding is fundamental to the achievement of critical-emancipatory knowledge, and it is the achievement of shared understanding which provides the major preoccupation of Habermas’s later work.

In elaborating his processual model of moral legitimation, Habermas acknowledges his debt to Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, for his model conforms to the assumptions of these theorists in two important respects. Firstly, the models of developmental moral psychology
proposed by both Kohlberg and Piaget offer a processual, rather than a substantive, conception of moral legitimation. That is, the validation of moral truth which they propose rests not on empirically verifiable correspondence to some supposed ontological reality but on the quality of the processes by which that truth is derived. This processual validation is, for Habermas, a key characteristic of the "constructivist concept of learning... [that is, that] knowledge in general can be analysed as a product of a learning process" (1990 [1983]: 33). In Habermas's case, normative legitimacy lies not in conformity to some absolute standards of substantive outcome but in relation to the quality of the dialogical processes by which that outcome is achieved.

A second enlightening feature of Kohlberg and Piaget's systems is their suggestion that those who are involved in a learning process can judge the inadequacy of an earlier stage of development from the position of enhanced critical insight that is afforded by having reached a later stage: "the learner can explain, in the light of his second interpretation, why his first interpretation is false" (1990 [1983]: 34), and "a subject who moves from one stage to the next should be able to explain why his higher stage judgements are more adequate than those at lower stages" (ibid: 38). Habermas appropriates this "internal logic of an irreversible learning process" (ibid: 35) by proposing that the perspectives which result from processes of dialogical engagement are necessarily superior to those which precede such engagement.

Emphasis on the Social Nature of Humanity

I have so far outlined Habermas model for a critical social theory. I have described how he differentiates the knowledge that it provides from that offered by both positivist natural science and hermeneutic social science. I have also explained how Habermas's critical social theory productively draws on certain aspects of these other two knowledge domains. Notwithstanding those commentators (e.g. Giddens, 1985) who lament the discontinuity between Habermas's earlier work and that which follows his so-called "linguistic turn" (Pusey, 1984), I propose that his elaboration of critical social theory provides a background for the increasingly explicit discussion of normative ethics that characterises his work after the early 1980s. I have begun to outline the latter by explaining how Habermas identifies, in developmental moral psychology, a test case for a model of moral legitimation which is processual and which appeals to the enhanced insights enabled by retrospective comparison. I will now outline the steps taken by Habermas to present his notion of communicative rationality as a source of moral legitimation.
In contrast to the individualistic focus of a great deal of principle-based and existentialist theory, Habermas emphasises the social constitution of humankind. In focusing on the social nature of the human condition, Habermas is not presenting a novel idea, for this same understanding defines Aristotelian moral and political philosophy. However, along with contemporary Aristotelian-inspired theorists such as MacIntyre (1985 [1981]), Taylor (1991) and Walzer (1995), Habermas proposes that the social understanding that had underpinned Classical theory has been lost to the modern era. Modern moral philosophy is thus premised upon atomistic individualism. MacIntyre attributes the Failure of the Enlightenment Project to this deficiency. According to MacIntyre, the principle-based theorists of the Enlightenment were as scientists trying to piece together the incomplete fragments of a once complete system of thought. Their vain efforts at reconstruction could only end in failure because they were deprived of the vital ingredient that gave this system unity and meaning: the Aristotelian focus on humanity’s social predicament. Habermas (1974 [1963]; 1990 [1983]) also describes the fundamental error of Enlightenment philosophers as lying in their individualist presuppositions; their conception of men and women as independent rather than as interdependent creatures. And the emotivist stances that have superseded the breakdown of principle-based ethics fare no better: by privileging the subjective over the intersubjective or by casting intersubjectivity as necessarily conflictual, existentialists are as culpable of marginalising humanity’s social character as are their Enlightenment predecessors.

It is important to emphasise the contrast between the social understanding which informs Habermas’s intersubjectivist ethics and that which underpins certain other perspectives which also claim fealty to social presuppositions but which reach different conclusions from Habermas. Firstly, a distinction needs to be drawn between the intersubjectivist position and the understanding which underpins the social contract theories reviewed earlier. Social contract theory seeks to establish a basis for the validity of the rules which govern men and women in society. However, this endeavour tends to start from the premise that humans are, by nature, solitary creatures who surrender their independence and some of its associated liberties in order to enjoy the fruits of social living. It thus commences from an atomistic rather than a social understanding of people. Social contract theory seeks to rationalise social arrangements in terms of the satisfaction of the economic and political needs of individuals. As Michael Walzer notes, it thereby gets things back to front, since it fails to acknowledge that: “we are by nature social, before we are political or economic beings” (1995: 16).
A second school of socially-oriented moral and political theory focuses on the creation and sustenance of social capital. Social capital is generally used to describe the relations which exist between individuals within families and communities and the extent to which these relations can bring about desirable states of affairs. Thus, Coleman describes the contribution of social capital to levels of educational achievement (Marshall, 1994) while Szreter (2001) proposes that, in order to achieve the perceived benefits of economic prosperity, organizations and governments need to attend to the development and sustenance of social capital rather than focussing uniquely on financial, human and biophysical capital. The common assumption in these positions is that the value of social capital lies in its capacity to bring about desirable ends: social capital is regarded as a necessary means to the achievement of ends which are, in themselves, considered to be morally estimable. As Taylor describes it: "the relationship is [seen as] secondary to the self-realisation of the partners" (1991: 43). Taylor explains the difference between this and the intersubjectivist position as that between needing relationships to fulfil ourselves and needing relationships to define ourselves: "I negotiate [my identity] through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalised, with others .... my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others" (1991: 47-48). In Habermas’s terms, “membership in such an ideal community is ... constitutive of both the I as universal and the I as individual” (1987 [1981]: 148).

Thirdly, it is important to note that, in emphasising the social constitution of humanity, Habermas is not offering an essentialist analysis. As Douglas Kellner (1989) points out, Habermas eschews the essentialism that underpins those Marxian perspectives that share his social preoccupation. In his social emphasis and his subsequent focus on communication, Habermas is not seeking to define the “true essence” of human nature. He is simply echoing Aristotle’s (1999 [334-322BC]) observation that people live in social groups, they always have done and they probably always will do. Therefore, any normative critique of human affairs must be built upon that premise.

In summary, Habermasian and neo-Aristotelian perspectives share a common focus on the social constitution of humanity which is opposed to the atomistic individualism which informs a great deal of Enlightenment theory. The uniquely Habermasian edifice, which is constructed upon this social analysis, is his focus on the importance of the achievement of understanding through communication, and his elaboration of a framework of communicative action which enables this.
Communicative Action, its Criticality to Social Existence and its Primacy over Strategic Action

For Habermas, communication is fundamental to those social relations which are an ineluctable aspect of the human condition. Without communication, it would not be possible to establish the bases of understanding and cooperation upon which social relations depend. Communication can take two different forms, each of which enables the achievement of a contrasting purpose. The first of these forms is referred to by Habermas as communicative action, which seeks to establish shared understanding. The second is strategic action, which is aimed at manipulating our environments and putting them to effective use. Since even strategic action needs to be socially coordinated, Habermas suggests that we must acknowledge the wider communication structures within which this coordination is located and upon which it depends. We are not able to achieve our strategic goals unless we first establish shared bases of understanding: "if the hearer failed to understand what the speaker was saying, a strategically acting speaker would not be able to bring the hearer, by means of communicative acts, to behave in the desired way" (1984 [1981]: 293). Habermas concludes that communicative action, carried out in an endeavour to achieve shared understanding, is therefore the primary role of communication. Strategic action, on the other hand, is a derivative usage that is dependent upon achievement of this primary role. For Habermas then, "reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech. ... The concepts of speech and understanding reciprocally interpret one another" (Habermas, 1984 [1981]: 287).

Communicative action is therefore integral to the human condition. Given the inescapability of this proposition, we can work towards a notion of communicative rationality which can offer a basis for normative legitimacy:

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication – and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement – then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of rationality inherent in communicative action (1984 [1981]: 397).

According to Habermas, communication involves the raising and challenging of validity claims by participants in discourse. When each person speaks, that person raises certain
validity claims, which the listener can either accept or reject. Habermas illustrates this idea, and also further demonstrates the primacy of communicative action over strategic action, by drawing upon John Austin’s (1961) analysis of different dimensions of a *speech act*. According to Austin, a speech act contains three different, but often interrelated, dimensions: the *locutionary*, the *illocutionary* and the *perlocutionary*. The locutionary dimension refers to the expression of a state of affairs. So, in saying something, a speaker makes an assertion about something in the world. The illocutionary dimension refers to the action that a speaker performs in saying something, such as making a confession, making a promise, avowing a commitment or issuing a command. The perlocutionary dimension refers to the effect that the speaker has in performing the speech act. By carrying out a speech act he or she thus brings about something in the world. Habermas summarises that “the three acts that Austin distinguishes can be characterised in the following catch phrases: to say *something*, to act *in* saying something, to bring about something *through* acting in saying something” (1984 [1981]: 289).

In performing a speech act, Habermas proposes that a speaker raises validity claims pertaining to each of these three dimensions. On a locutionary dimension, the speech act appeals to the existence of a shared basis of factual understanding. On an illocutionary dimension, it appeals to shared norms by which the performance of the speech act is legitimised. And on a perlocutionary dimension, it appeals to a shared understanding of the speaker’s purpose in carrying out the speech act. Unless shared understanding is reached across locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions, the coordination upon which intersubjectivist agreement depends has not been achieved.

In order to ensure the achievement of shared understanding, the validity claims which are raised by the speaker across each dimension must be subject to challenge by the listener. Challenging validity claims is essential to communicative action: it enables participants in communication to establish mutually agreed premises. Communicative action involves “cooperative processes of interpretation [in which] no participant has a monopoly on correct interpretation” (Habermas, 1987 [1981]: 100). So when a divergence arises between situation definitions, “the interpretive task consists in incorporating the others interpretation of the situation in such a way that ... the divergent situation definitions can be brought to coincide sufficiently” (ibid: 100). Communicative action thus enables a meeting of *lifeworld* commitments, where lifeworld is understood as the “more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions ...[which] serves as a source or situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic” (Habermas, 1984 [1981]: 70). It also
permits differences in the lifeworld commitments of participants in communication to be recognised and negotiated.

For Habermas, then, achieving understanding through communication is not about linguistic familiarisation but, ultimately, it is about raising validity claims and being able to challenge the validity claims raised by others upon each of the three dimensions of a speech act: "The speech act of one person succeeds only if the other accepts the offer contained in it by taking (however implicitly) a 'yes' or 'no' position on a validity claim that is in principle criticisable." (1984 [1981]: 287).

Thus, integrating insights from Habermas' earlier and later work, we arrive at the form of rationality which is apposite to the domain of critical-emancipatory knowledge and by which the validity of the normative and regulative statements that are made within that domain is to be judged. This is the notion of communicative rationality; a rationality which validates moral truths:

This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld (1984 [1981]: 10).

Truth, then, lies in and can only lie in the establishment of shared lifeworld commitments. Albrecht Wellmer summarises Habermas's position thus:

a reflexive conception of human communication according to which validity claims, because they can only emerge from the sphere of communication, can also only be redeemed in the sphere of human discourse: there are no possible external sources of validity, since the sphere of validity is – conceptually is – identical with the sphere of human speech (1985: 53).

Communicative Action and Discourse Ethics

Habermas thus claims to have presented a transcendental-pragmatic valorisation of communicative rationality as the basis for normative critique: pragmatic insofar as it is related to the fulfilment of human needs; transcendental, in a Kantian sense, insofar as it defines the fundamental presuppositions upon which any endeavour to meet those needs
must be premised. It concerns "the general symmetry that every competent speaker who believes he is engaging in argumentation must presuppose as actually fulfilled" (Habermas, 1990 [1983]: 88). This is that of an "unrestricted communication community" (ibid: 88) in which the force of the better argument is allowed to prevail unaffected by external or internal coercion and which "neutralises all motives other than a cooperative search for truth" (ibid: 89).

Habermas acknowledges that this ideal speech situation is indeed an ideal, since we rarely engage in communication in a state of disinterested neutrality. Communication is usually situated within strategic contexts insofar as we communicate in order to bring something about and we generally have some degree of emotional commitment to, or vested interest in, the outcome of that communication. Nevertheless, by establishing common ground on each of the dimensions of the speech act, non-coerced, shared understanding can still be achieved. Specifically, even when acting strategically, as long as validity claims are made apparent by the speaker, as long as all parties to communication are at liberty to challenge the validity claims raised by other parties, and as long as such challenges are responded to with transparency and sincerity, shared understanding can be reached.

Habermas expresses the principles of discourse ethics which flow from this analysis of communication as follows:

3.1 Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse
3.2 a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
   b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
   c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
3.3 No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in 3.1 and 3.2 (1990 [1983]: 89).

These process rules have a moral content in that they provide a basis for the universalisation principle that is a transcendental presupposition of ethical discourse: "everyone who seriously tries to discursively redeem normative claims to validity intuitively accepts procedural conditions that amount to implicitly acknowledging [this universal principle]" (Habermas, 1990 [1983]: 93). Thus, we come to the holy grail of discourse ethics; the overriding principle which provides normative legitimacy; "the assertion that the philosopher as moral theorist ultimately seeks to justify ... [that is] the transcendental-pragmatic justification of a rule of argumentation with normative content" (ibid: 94). This is
that: “only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse” (ibid: 93).

Habermas draws attention to the formal, as opposed to substantive, nature of this principle of discourse ethics. In other words that, in itself, this principle provides no substantive guidance but only a process for debating substantive issues. It therefore makes no claims to generate justified norms; rather, it offers a process for testing the validity of norms brought to it:

Discourse ethics does not set up substantive orientations. Instead, it establishes a procedure based on presuppositions and designed to guarantee the impartiality of the process of judging. Practical discourse is a procedure for testing the validity of hypothetical norms, not for producing justified norms. It is this proceduralism that sets discourse ethics apart from other cognitivist, universalist, and formalist ethical theories (1990 [1983]: 122).

Habermas also emphasises discourse ethics’ reliance on the practical contexts that give meaning to those substantive issues:

It would be utterly pointless to engage in a practical discourse without a horizon provided by the lifeworld of a specific social group and without real conflicts in a concrete situation in which the actors consider it incumbent upon them to reach a consensual means of regulating some controversial social matter (1990 [1983]: 103).

**Broadening the Scope of Communicative Action**

Habermas’s model for communicative action has been criticised for sanctioning a particular form of rational articulation at the expense of alternative modes of expression. Iris Young (1996), for example, suggests that Habermas’s emphasis on rational argumentation implies exclusive entry to modes of articulation that are emotionally-controlled and logically presented. In Young’s opinion, a characteristically white, male, upper-class style of communicative engagement is thus privileged. Such partiality may marginalise gender, ethnic and socio-economic groups that do not conform so readily to Habermas’s model of rational articulation. Indeed, certain groups may even self-deselect from communicative action as a consequence of an “internalised sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others” (Young, 1996: 122).
To avoid restricting the scope of communication in this manner, the range of permissible modes of expression needs to be broadened: for example, Young suggests that rhetoric, storytelling and greeting can each make a valuable contribution to communicative action. Of equal, if not greater importance, is sharing the onus of interpretation between the listener and the speaker, rather than placing it solely on the latter. Alasdair Maclntyre's (1988) discussion of imaginative engagement between traditions suggests that, in order to inhabit an unaccustomed cultural position, it is necessary for the interpreter to take proactive steps to engage with the manner of its expression. Therefore, although a commitment to personal transparency and openness on the part of those contributing to communicative interaction may be a necessary condition for undistorted communication, this needs to be augmented by a positive effort on the part of all participants to engage with whatever mode of expression is favoured by fellow interlocutors.

**Implications for Moral Leadership**

If the moral legitimacy of a state of affairs derives from the processual conditions by which that state of affairs comes about, then the role of moral leaders is, firstly, to facilitate such legitimising processual conditions and, secondly, to ensure that their own conduct conforms to them. More specifically, moral leaders will ensure that the voice of every organizational member can be heard; that all can question any assertion, including those made by the leader; that all are able to introduce any assertion whatever into discourse; that all are permitted to express their attitudes, desires and needs and that no person is prevented, by internal or external coercion, from participating in this manner. No participant in discourse should be prevented from challenging the validity claims raised by fellow participants. Sincerity and mutual understanding on the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of speech should be encouraged by the leader.

Now, discourse within organizations is hardly likely to conform to the disinterested quest for shared understanding that Habermas's ideal speech conditions envisage. It seems far fetched to expect discussions about organizational objectives and the means by which they are to be achieved to be conducted with the detached neutrality of a philosophy seminar. Nevertheless, the strategic context of dialogue need not undermine its legitimating force as long as all parties are open about any vested interests or emotional attachment that they may have to the outcomes of the discussion. Furthermore, there is an onus on leaders not just to provide opportunities for diverse perspectives to be expressed and heard but also to enable whatever non-standard modes such expression may require. Leaders therefore need to think creatively about how such access can be offered within organizations. They should also
encourage participants in communication to take responsibility for engaging with the perspectives of fellow interlocutors: communicative action should not be seen as a passive undertaking; it demands proactive hermeneutic endeavour on the part of all participants, including leaders.

Intersubjectivist moral leadership in organizations clearly has a strong consultative tone. Apprehension of the moral legitimacy of a course of action is not a unilateral achievement on the part of the leader; it is achieved in relation to the dialogical processes by which that course of action has come about. Unlike principle-based and existentialist versions, intersubjectively ethical leadership holds no space for unilateralism. Principle-based ethics permits leaders to unilaterally assess the moral legitimacy of both the goals towards which they lead and the manner in which they build support for these goals. Existentialism also has a monological tone, basing moral legitimacy in the commitment of the agent. Unilateral decision making and monological legitimisation are precluded by intersubjectivist ethics: intersubjectively ethical leadership cannot but be facilitative.

Organizational leaders who aspire to this facilitative role confront a number of practical challenges. Their first task is to ensure an atmosphere that is supportive of the processual conditions of ideal speech. This may not be a simple undertaking: organizational members may be unwilling to either discard or declare their emotional commitments and hidden agendas; issues of power and self-interest may intrude into communicative fora; furthermore, participants in communication may find it hard to adopt the requisite attitude of imaginative engagement towards their fellow interlocutors.

In this respect, it should be noted that the intersubjectivist ethic need not preclude the application of social influence by the leader. Intersubjectively moral leadership holds a place for leaders to shape the organizational context, to encourage certain behaviours and to discourage others. However, intersubjectivist ethics demands that social influence be applied within clearly defined parameters. Most importantly, it should not be used to bring about particular agendas favoured by the leader. It is to be applied only in the interests of achieving the processual conditions demanded by the principles of discourse ethics. In its ideal form, then, intersubjectivist leadership stands in marked contrast to the popular vision of heroic business leaders parachuting into organizations, rallying support for their unilaterally-shaped agendas and thus leading the organization, along with those of its members who survive this transformational intervention, towards a better future.
A second challenge to intersubjectivist leadership concerns the extent to which leader­follower relationships may be intrinsically inhibitive of the conditions of ideal speech that are envisaged by Habermas. No matter how genuinely leaders may advocate the principles of discourse ethics, the formal and social dynamics of their relationship with so-called followers may influence the latter in such a way that their participation in communication is restrained. In particular, followers may be disinclined to challenge the validity claims which leaders raise with their own speech acts. Clearly, in encouraging others to respect the conditions of ideal speech, leaders need to be sensitive to the potential for distorted communication that lies immanent within any such application of social influence on their part.

A further area of difficulty concerns the extent to which monologically achieved analyses of their own behaviour on the part of leaders can claim any degree of legitimacy. Leaders need some way of reflecting on and assessing the moral calibre of their own conduct. Yet, just as monological definition of an organization’s agenda is precluded by the processual conditions of intersubjectivist ethics, so is monological assessment of leaders’ fealty to those conditions precluded. For any such assessment to be valid, it must also be arrived at through intersubjectivist discourse undertaken in ideal speech conditions. Each stage of discursive engagement, then, needs to be discursively audited by another stage in order to confirm that it has conformed to the processually legitimising criteria of discourse ethics. Meanwhile, this further stage has, itself, to be similarly legitimated, and so on ad infinitum. The very concept of leadership thus becomes a frozen into inaction by the need for continual verification in a never ending succession of intersubjectivist fora.

If, in their practical application to organizational leadership contexts, the principles of communicative action are to avoid this log jam of intersubjective auditing, some legitimising space must be allocated to self-discipline and self-reflection. Leaders need to commit themselves to the principles of ideal speech and exercise the requisite self-discipline to ensure that their own behaviour meets that commitment. They must also be willing to reflect on the extent to which they measure up to that undertaking. This will call for an element of self-doubt: genuine self-reflection on whether one’s behaviour has met a required standard necessarily entails acknowledgement of the possibility that it has not. Therefore, despite the dialogical nature of intersubjectivist ethics, there is an unavoidable need for a degree of monological self-management on the part of all participants and, given their potential immunity to challenge, particularly on the part of leaders.
Perhaps the greatest practical barrier to the application of intersubjectivist ethics to organizational leadership lies in its apparent dependency on the possibility of consensus. Habermas’s model of communicative action seems to rest upon an assumption that, as long as all the legitimising conditions of ideal speech are adhered to, shared understanding will be the eventual outcome. This expectation seems a little far fetched. Indeed, as Kellner (1989) points out, Habermas’s critics have suggested that his preoccupation with consensus may actually encourage authoritarian manipulation and the repression of difference as those in authority seek to achieve that morally legitimising end-point. Leaders’ desire to build commitment to a false consensus may thus encourage them to silent discrepant voices and suppress plurality.

These challenges undermine the possibility of intersubjectively ethical leadership only if that possibility is regarded in absolute terms. While the absolutism of the principle-based theories that pervade the Anglo-American philosophical tradition encourages such an expectation of practical ethics, it need not be regarded thus. Absolute consensus may be a rare achievement; furthermore, all of the other legitimising conditions spelled out by Habermas may seldom be realised in practice. Nevertheless, a decision, although lacking absolute consensus, can still be regarded as morally superior for having been reached through discursive processes carried out with a genuine commitment to the principles of communicative action. Even if those decision-making processes have not attained Habermasian perfection, and even if the eventual decision fails to achieve the support of every participant, that decision is still morally superior, in intersubjectively ethical terms, from one which has eschewed such processes. The practical elusiveness of intersubjectively ethical perfection does not stop one state of affairs from being better than another; the north pole of Habermasian ethical perfection may be beyond reach but it can still offer a magnetic focal point against which leaders can orient their intersubjectivist moral compasses.

Of course, such qualifications about the practical feasibility of intersubjectively ethical perfection may simply be taken as a justification for leaders to drop the processual cloak of communicative action whenever it suits their agenda to do so, whilst still claiming intersubjectivist moral legitimacy for that agenda. This concern seems particularly apposite given the prevalence of “pseudo-participation” in contemporary work organizations (Claydon, 2000). However, such rhetorical, instrumental and expediently selective application of participative leadership approaches is not immune to challenge. Although organizational leaders may be tempted to slip in and out of intersubjective fealty according to its congruence with non-intersubjectively defined agendas, there is nothing to stop observers challenging the legitimacy of such a tactic. And receptivity to such challenges is
fundamental to intersubjectivist legitimacy: for leaders to repeatedly rebuff critique of their commitment to the principles of discourse ethics would be to place a stick of dynamite beneath their own claims to intersubjectivist legitimacy.

I will conclude this discussion of intersubjectivist ethics and leadership by discussing a particular challenge to which Habermas devotes a great deal of attention. This challenge relates to his observations regarding the pre-eminence of steering media such as power and money in the contemporary organizational context and the consequent marginalisation of communicative action as a means of negotiating shared lifeworld understanding.

For Habermas, lifeworld comprises those implicit normative and cognitive assumptions which provide a basis for shared action and thought. Mutuality of lifeworld commitments is a prerequisite of social coexistence and it is this mutuality which is brought about by communicative action. According to Habermas, the importance of communicative action to the negotiation of shared lifeworld understanding has escalated in modernity as a consequence of the disenchantment, or decentring, of those traditional forms that had hitherto provided unifying force. The increased capacity for actors to define separate, individualised understandings places greater onus on communicative action to establish shared bases for social action. Habermas identifies alternative forms of coordinating mechanism which have evolved in order to lighten the growing burden on communicative action. The most notable of these delinguistified steering media are money and power. As a consequence, it is these steering media, rather than communicative action, which provide an increasingly dominant basis for social coordination: “generalised instrumental values such as money and power ... replace language as the mechanism for coordinating action.” (1984 [1981]: 342).

The consequence of intervention by delinguistified steering media is a progressive rationalisation of social action: action is coordinated not on the basis of a shared lifeworld understanding that has a normative dimension, but on the basis of quantifiable systemic steering media. The systemic imperatives which have come to provide the basis for social action are devoid of normative content and provide scant opportunity for negotiating the full breadth of lifeworld mutuality:

the rationalisation of the lifeworld makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrative effect on the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984 [1981]: 342-343).
Habermas thus echoes Weber (1968 [1911-1920]) in pointing to a process of rationalisation in which bureaucratic rationality takes on a quasi-autonomous status, with its own self-contained normative commitments, through systemic distortion of communicative rationality. It subverts the role of communicative action in establishing shared premises of lifeworld understanding through the raising and challenging of validity claims. Thus the "subjective inconspicuousness of systemic constraints that instrumentalise a communicatively structured lifeworld take on the character of deception, of objectively false consciousness .... Structural violence is exercised by way of systematic restrictions on communication." (Habermas, 1987 [1981]: 187). The ultimate consequence is that systemic imperatives, which have thus become uncoupled from lifeworld realms of communicative agreement and which have come to attain an objectified status, penetrate the lifeworld. And since the steering mechanisms of systemic integration are ill-suited for the intersubjectivist negotiation of meaning, they undermine the capacity of the lifeworld to fulfil this role:

"In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas where a consensus dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas, the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of a colonisation" (1987 [1981]: 196).

A key challenge to intersubjectively ethical organizational leadership, then, is that the steering media of power and money have become so deeply imbued in organizations, and so definitive of the lifeworld commitments of organizational members, that there remains little opportunity for communicative action. In other, less Habermasian, words: people are too committed to the imperatives of capitalist enterprise to bother with all this nonsense about reaching shared normative understanding. However, while this represents a challenge to intersubjectivist mediation within organizations, it also represents an opportunity for moral leadership. Whereas commentators such as Weber (1968 [1911-1920], Adorno and Horkheimer (1997 [1944]) present a pretty gloomy outlook for the future of modernity, Habermas believes that resistance to systemic rationality across a range of fora can lay the foundation for a reassertion of communicatively negotiated lifeworld. Habermas focuses on those "domains of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation" (1987 [1981]: 392) which operate in the public sphere, trusting in institutions such as single-issue protest groups, the environmental lobby, student bodies and the press to reconnect a shared lifeworld with its normative dimension. But there must also be an opportunity here for organizational leaders to make intersubjective space and thus to contribute towards a more communicatively legitimated society: just as bureaucratic organizations provide a fertile
terrain for systemic domination of lifeworld commitments, they also offer a possible incubator for a reassertion of communicative action. As well as presenting a possible legitimising force for organizational decisions and actions, then, intersubjectivist leadership may also be able to contribute to a reaffirmation of communicative action on a broader scale.
Locating Empirical Research within the Broader Context of the PhD

My empirical research needs to be considered within the context of my overall aim in this PhD. That is, to develop a normative model of moral leadership. As a preliminary to this undertaking, I identified two areas of concern which, I believe, are raised by the notion of leadership: that it might be used to bring about objectives that are of questionable moral value and that it may suppress the agency of so-called "followers". I then reviewed the leadership literature. The literature seeks to identify recipes for effective leadership. However, if leadership is to be both effective and moral then these recipes also need to respond to the two areas of moral concern mentioned above. I therefore structured my review around these two areas. I endeavoured to draw out the implications that the different theories hold for each, thus illustrating the extent to which the theories either exacerbate or ameliorate it. In the next section I reviewed the ethics literature to explore the implications that it may hold for leadership. I structured this review around three meta-ethical perspectives; three different ways of thinking about morality. I sought to identify how each of these perspectives might contribute to our thinking about morality and leadership.

In the present section I will approach this undertaking from yet another direction. I will explore the way in which practising leaders think about the morality of their leadership role. I will explore the extent to which they articulate the three meta-ethical perspectives discussed in the second section along with the tensions that this presents within the organizational leadership domain. I will also consider the extent to which these people respond to the areas of moral concern discussed in the first section. I thus hope to add further insights to those enabled by these preceding sections. On the conclusion of this empirical section I hope to be better placed to generate a normative model of moral leadership.
4.1 DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

The specific objective of my empirical research was to find out how people who occupy formal leadership roles in work organizations think about the moral responsibilities that this entails. In sociological-methodological terms, this is an interpretive project insofar as it sets out "to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2003: 16). Nevertheless, this interpretive enquiry is undertaken in the interest of an overriding normative purpose. It therefore differs from a great deal of empirical enquiry that has been undertaken in the field of business ethics; enquiry which follows a purely descriptive agenda with no normative pretensions. Such offerings sometimes restrict themselves to describing the rationale upon which different business people make ethical choices (e.g. de Graaf, 2001). Alternatively, they may go a stage further and seek to identify either commonalities between the approaches adopted by different people (e.g. Das, 2005) or causal factors that account for contrasting ethical decision-making frameworks (e.g. Schminke and Ambrose, 1997; Forte, 2004; Brammer and Millington, 2006). Other commentators have gone on to reflect on the possible implications of contrasting approaches to ethical decision-making (e.g. Premeux, 2004; Krambia-Kapardis and Zopiatis, 2008) or have used observed differences as a basis for prescribing practical organizational responses (e.g. Sims and Gegez, 2004; Valentine et al, 2006). Some have taken this performative application yet further in exploring the links between the behaviour and attitudes of senior managers, insofar as these operationalise organizations' corporate social responsibility policies, and corporate performance (e.g. Pivato et al, 2008; Perrini and Minoja, 2008). The characteristic which these offerings share is that they make no attempt to generate normative conclusions. My intention, on the other hand, is to use the findings of my empirical research to assist with the elaboration of a normative model of ethical leadership.

My agenda also differs from that of many of those empirically focussed business ethics research papers that do include a normative dimension. The latter often explore the extent to which business practice departs from either the espoused ethical norms of particular organizations (e.g. Martinez and Crowther, 2008) or those norms championed more generally by business communities (e.g. Smith-Hillman, 2007). Even more common are enquiries into the extent to which management or corporate behaviour conforms to normative standards whose legitimacy is presupposed by researchers (e.g. Vountisjarvi, 2006; Pratten, 2007; Fisher and Downes, 2008). The difference between these offerings and my approach is that the former tend to begin with a pre-defined normative stance, going on
to identify and describe empirical divergences from it. I, on the other hand, am not beginning with predefined normative stance. On the contrary, this is the intended outcome of my research; not its starting point.

During this chapter I propose to discuss how I went about achieving my empirical research objective. The chapter begins with a description of the people who I asked to participate in my empirical research, along with an outline of my rationale for selecting this particular sample. A discussion of my response to two metaphysical questions relating to qualitative ethics research follows; questions that seemed particularly apposite to my enquiry. The subsequent consideration of methodological detail includes an outline of some of the responses that I adopted to these metaphysical questions. I will also discuss some specific tools that seemed appropriate to my empirical enquiry. The chapter concludes with an outline of how I went about analysing the data produced during the course of my research.

Research Sample Selection

I chose to involve people who occupy prominent leadership roles in my empirical research for a number of reasons. The first reason might be described as “opportunistic” (Bryman and Bell, 2003) insofar as personal contacts initially facilitated access to this group. During my own management career I had made the acquaintance of a number of people who either work as CEOs/MDs21 or who could introduce me to such people22. Using a snowballing (Goodman, 1961), or respondent-driven sampling (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004) approach, I was therefore able to gain access to an “elite” through other members of that elite (Pettigrew and McNulty, 1995, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003). As I subsequently found out, these personal contacts was not quite as important for persuading people to participate in my research as I had assumed. This resource dried up before I had gathered the volume of data I required, so I wrote to some more CEOs direct and asked them to participate. This “cold calling” approach actually elicited quite a positive response23.

Despite the opportunistic nature of my choice of research participants, there was also a more compelling rationale for involving people who occupy formal leadership roles. Bryman (1988, cited in Gill and Johnson, 1997: 153) observes that the “quirkiness and messiness” of research in practice will inevitably compromise attempts to conform to the

21 I was already personally acquainted with two of my research participants.
22 Eight people agreed to participate as a result of such referrals from my management contacts. One other was referred by an academic colleague.
23 Five out of the eight people who I contacted directly agreed to meet me.
"rational reconstructed logic of the textbook account" (Gill and Johnson, ibid). In particular, the availability of resources often dictates both the choice of research agendas and the methods chosen to pursue those agendas. For example, considerations of resource availability may account for the frequent use of students as subjects for academic research, resulting in findings that are "expeditious and publishable whether what is produced is worth knowing or not" (Gill and Johnson, ibid: 154). This is a particular issue in relation to business ethics research, where a number of recent studies have focused upon the attitudes and behaviour of students (e.g. Angelidis and Ibrahim, 2004; Connelly et al, 2004; D'Aquila et al 2004; Smyth et al 2004: Karassavidou and Glaveli, 2007; Stedham et al, 2007). While such studies provide interesting insights to students' attitudes, motivations and perceptions, they reveal little about the attitudes, motivations and perceptions of those people who confront the real-time ethical dilemmas presented by organizational life. As such, although such studies conform to reliability criteria and may be valid in other respects, they fail the test of ecological validity (Bryman and Bell, 2003) in that they do little to enhance understanding of the actual practice of business ethics.

In contrast to such student-oriented research, it seemed particularly apposite to involve organizational leaders in my research. Not only do these people occupy roles in which they are formally expected to provide leadership; it is also reasonable to presume that their appointment to these roles owes a lot to their proven effectiveness as leaders. Thus, prima facie, they are both good at being leaders and familiar with the ethical challenges that "doing leadership" presents. Since they meet the requirements of ecological validity, it seems sensible to include their views in the elaboration of a normative model of ethical organizational leadership.

By inviting only the leaders of organizations to participate in my research, I have deliberately made a significant omission. That is, I have not sought input from the many other people in organizations who these people are expected to lead. In other words, I have not asked "followers" what they think about ethical leadership. Now, it might be argued in defence of this omission that those who occupy leadership roles are most likely to have reflected on the ethical implications of that undertaking so will have most to contribute to the elaboration of a normative model. However, I make no such assertion. It seems to me that those who bear the consequences of the ethically-charged decisions made by leaders, particularly those whose material and emotional well-being may have been harmed by those decisions, are likely to have as much to say about their ethicality as the leaders themselves. Furthermore, the perspective articulated by leaders may well be representative of a characteristically managerialist mindset (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Parker, 2002) to the
exclusion of alternative perspectives that might challenge its legitimacy. Consulting other people in organizations may have offered some antidote to this one-sided expression of managerialism.

Instead of justifying my decision to include only leaders on the basis of their unique qualification for such a role, I will make two points in support of my non-inclusion of other organizational members. Firstly, I will stress that, by accessing and drawing upon the discourse of organizational leaders, I am not honouring that discourse with the tag of normative legitimacy. My intention in this PhD is to synthesise these empirical accounts with the perspectives offered by the ethics and leadership literature. By considering the views of research participants through the lens of the literature, I expect to expose them to critique. Furthermore, my natural inclination is towards a sceptical hearing of the discourse of organizational leaders. Despite a fairly lengthy career in senior management, during a great deal of which I wholeheartedly and unreflectively embraced the managerialist discourse, my eventual stance upon moving away from that career was much more critical: disenchantment had set in. This disenchantment, along with my subsequent reading of more radical perspectives, will, I hope, offer some balance.

Nevertheless, in offering to practising leaders a place at the table of dialogue that is denied to representatives of other hierarchical strata, I have necessarily accorded to them a certain privilege: it is their words that I am synthesising with the literature, not the words of anyone else; it is their discourse that I am exposing to critique, not that of their so-called followers. The second part of my response is, therefore, to concede that there is a place for further research that embraces the views of other non-leadership organizational players. My PhD is not intended as a finished pronouncement on the state of ethical organizational leadership; rather it is to be viewed as an exploratory contribution to an ongoing normative project.

Sample Details

Sixteen people participated in my empirical research. I had initially expected that between twelve and twenty people would provide the required depth and breadth of data but was prepared to continue expanding the sample if necessary. However, I found that, by the sixteenth person, I was reaching a point of theoretical saturation at which “new data [were] no longer illuminating the concept[s]” (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 428) that were evolving throughout the research exercise. I therefore decided to stop at sixteen.
All of my research participants had occupied prominent organizational leadership roles. Twelve of the sixteen either were currently fulfilling, or had previously fulfilled, roles as CEOs and/or MDs in large organizations. The remaining four had occupied substantial executive board roles: two had been finance directors and two had been HR directors with big private companies and/or large public sector organizations. In addition, several respondents also undertook formal leadership duties outside of their main job responsibilities, either with trade associations, sports organizations or charities. One participant had retired from paid employment, although he still worked voluntarily as director of two sports organizations. Two had left their leadership roles in the corporate world to pursue self-employment.

Bryman and Bell (2003) point to a potential drawback to the opportunistic, snowballing (Goodman, 1961) approach that I initially employed. This is that there may be quite a lot of overlap in the backgrounds of the participants to which it gives access. I found this to be the case. For example, I began by interviewing a cluster of CEOs and MDs of which three had commenced their management careers with the same brewery and three had worked with the same major retailer. I therefore sought to compensate for this by introducing an element of purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to my later selection of additional interview candidates. I was thus eventually able to access the perspectives of people from a range of businesses that included financial services, hospitality, travel, music, sport, food and agricultural produce and healthcare. My eventual sample also included representatives from the public and voluntary sectors: four people had accrued leadership experience in local government administration, business support and public authority care services, while one was finance director with one of the UK’s largest charitable organizations. Purposive sampling also gave access to more female participants than had initially taken part: four of the eventual sixteen were female. I should stress, however, that my intention in accessing a more heterogeneous sample was not to generate sector-based or gender-based comparisons; only to incorporate the views of a theoretically interesting cross-section of organizational leaders. I have provided a more detailed profile of each research participant in chapters 5.1 and 5.2 as part of my empirical report.

**Metaphysical Challenges Associated With My Research**

Two particular questions are apposite to my empirical research. Each of these questions is of relevance to hermeneutically-oriented research in general. However, each also seems to have particular significance for ethically-oriented hermeneutic enquiry. I will begin by discussing the first of these questions, which is of an ontological nature, before moving on
to the second, which is epistemologically-focussed. The subsequent, more detailed discussion of choice and application of empirical research method includes consideration of appropriate responses to the challenges presented by these two questions.

An ontological question

My purpose in undertaking empirical research was to gain access to practising leaders' understanding of the moral implication of their leadership role. My ontologically-oriented question relates to the status of that understanding. More specifically, it concerns the extent to which the moral understanding that I sought to access was pre-determined prior to the interview and the extent to which it was negotiated during the interview process. This is not a question of meta-ethics: it is not a question of the ontological status of the principles of goodness and rightness upon which a participant's ethical understanding is based, but on the status of that understanding. It begs the question whether ethical understanding is itself a pre-determined reality that can be revealed by empirical enquiry or whether that understanding is a constructed phenomenon that is generated during the course of enquiry.

To adopt the former stance — what might be called a realist-interpretive perspective on ethical understanding, would be to approach my research as a hermeneutic undertaking with a strongly positivist flavour. It would be to regard the different understandings that I was seeking to elucidate as objectively existent phenomena that could be accessed and represented as they stood. To approach the research from the opposite perspective would be to take what I will call a constructivist-interpretive stance; to impute to moral understanding a less predetermined status and to accede to the inevitability of its negotiation via discursive encounters.

Now, on this question of whether ethical understanding is predetermined or negotiated through its expression, my view is that it is probably a bit of both. Furthermore, I suspect that the extent to which it is more of one than the other varied from one interview to the next. Some research participants appeared to have come to the interview meetings equipped with a fairly well-established personal understanding of right and wrong in relation to leadership's ethical challenges. Others seemed less accustomed to thinking in depth about ethics. Similarly, while some seemed morally self-assured and unlikely to alter their predetermined ethical commitments, others demonstrated a more discursively responsive demeanour.
However, this question of ontological status raises a further question. The reason that I was keen to access interviewees’ moral understanding is for the contribution that it might make to the elaboration of a normative model of ethical leadership. Should I therefore have taken a realist interpretive stance and aimed solely at elucidating a pre-existing ethical understanding, purposefully avoiding any intervention that may have shaped the nature of that understanding so as to replicate it in its purest possible form? On the other hand, how realistic would such an endeavour have been? If moral commitment is viewed as something that is, at least partially, negotiated and sustained through discourse, perhaps I should have embraced every opportunity to evoke critical reflection on the part of interviewees in the hope that the understanding with which they left the interview meetings would be somehow enhanced as a result of those encounters.

To wholeheartedly adopt the latter approach would have been congruent with certain aspects of critical theoretical and action research. It would accord with the “emancipatory” (Bronner, 1994) tone of a critical theoretical approach to empirical research insofar as reflection on the part of participants may have surfaced tensions between what Habermas (1984 [1981]; 1987 [1981]) would refer to as their lifeworld commitments and the management imperatives of a system that is rooted in the individualising logic of modernity. Furthermore, although avoiding the “clinical” (Schein 1987, cited in Gill and Johnson, 1997) quality that often characterises consultancy-oriented action research interventions, it would accord with Gill and Johnson’s depiction of action research as being concerned with praxis, or “with the art of taking action in problematic situations in order to change them” (1997: 74). Such an agenda would be particularly resonant with Reason’s (2001) portrayal of action research as a collaborative endeavour aimed at evoking reflective change on the part of research participants.

However, this was not my intention. My primary objective in conducting empirical research was not to change the way that research participants understand the ethical implications of leadership. It was to form a picture of that understanding so that this could be used as one building block in the construction of a normative model. Nevertheless, several points need to be made about my pursuit of this objective. The first point is that it does not imply unequivocal fealty to a realist-interpretive perspective. As I have already noted, I suspect that moral understanding is at least partially negotiated during the process of its articulation. The second point is that, although encouraging research participants to reflect on their ethical understanding was not the main objective of my empirical research, if this was an outcome of some research interviews then this is no bad thing. If the understanding expressed by research participants was a negotiated outcome of the research discussion,
then it has already moved some way along the conveyor belt of synthesis with alternative perspectives which was the overall aim of my PhD. Furthermore, on the level of individual praxis, if articulation, rationalisation and justification of their ethical understanding evoked critical reflection on the part of research participants, then, although not its prime objective, this is a welcome corollary to my empirical enquiry.

An epistemological question

So much for the ontological question of realism versus constructivism in relation to ethical understanding. What of the epistemological question? That epistemological question concerns the extent to which the impressions of leaders' ethical understanding that were revealed by empirical enquiry were accurate impressions. The accuracy of those impressions is likely to have been influenced by two factors. Firstly, the extent to which participants were disposed to present an honest and frank exposition of their understanding (regardless of whether that understanding was ontologically predetermined prior to discussion or negotiated in the process of discussion); secondly the extent to which I, as a researcher, have been able to adequately interpret and represent that understanding. To some extent, these epistemological issues are avoided by the emancipatory and change-oriented agendas of critical theory and action research: if the purpose of my research had been to bring about emancipatory change to, rather than to accurately record, the subject of study, then the urgency of the question of epistemological accuracy would have faded. However, since my purpose was to capture that ethical understanding and to put it to use in developing a normative model of ethical leadership, the accuracy with which I have been able do so is important.

As far as the first issue is concerned, the extent to which research participants were disposed to offer a truthful account of their moral understanding, I will make one observation. This is that, when recounting their real-life responses to moral dilemmas, or when telling me what they would do in hypothetically problematic situations, research participants may indeed have offered accounts that are judiciously modified for public consumption. However, this does not diminish the relevance of those accounts. Participants are unlikely to have presented themselves as more morally reprehensible than they are (if, indeed, they are morally reprehensible at all). It is more likely that any lack of candour on their part will have involved air-brushing their accounts in order to present themselves and their organizations as more, rather than less, morally praiseworthy. In such cases then, what they have told me is not what they actually did but what they think would have been a morally right thing for them to have done. Thus, they have offered me an insight into their
moral understanding. And since this is what I was seeking to access, the content of these articulations is perhaps more important than their congruity with the teller's actual behaviour.

The measures that I took to encourage openness on the part of participants are discussed below. As for the second issue, the extent to which I have been able to accurately interpret the understandings that were presented, this depends on the extent to which an effective harmony of our respective terminological and conceptual understandings has been achieved. This, in turn, leads to a more fundamental question. That is, to what extent can the ethical understanding of one person be truly understood by another? I will give some consideration to this broader issue before turning to more detailed discussion of research method.

The issue of incommensurability of rival paradigms, or of contrasting systems of rationality, looms large in a meta-theoretical landscape that is influenced by writers from Thomas Kuhn to Michel Foucault. I have already, in my discussion of intersubjectivist ethics, touched on this question; that for one person to truly understand the rationale of another he or she must be able to identify with it. As Habermas puts it "only to the extent to which the interpreter also grasps the reasons why the author's utterances seem rational to the author himself does he understand what the author meant" (1990 [1983]: 30, italics in original).

The question of commensurability is complex and contested and I will not attempt to discuss it in detail here. Rather, I will note that the stance that I adopted in relation to my research accords with that of writers such as Richard Bernstein and Alasdair MacIntyre. Bernstein (1983) suggests that incommensurability does not necessarily entail incomparability. Just because contrasting systems of thought, which includes contrasting ethical rationales, may be logically self-contained and thus unable to mesh with one another does not mean that a person who inhabits one of these systems is incapable of hermeneutically occupying the other. MacIntyre, in his discussion of contrasting moral traditions, also proposes the feasibility of hermeneutic engagement but emphasises the need to imaginatively "live within" a tradition that contrasts with ones own in order to understand it.

Therefore, in reporting on the ethical perspectives articulated by those people who participated in my research, I have attempted to undertake such imaginative engagement and will try to facilitate the same for readers. However, I will also remain mindful of the
difficulties that this presents; particularly of the danger that I may have misunderstood or that I may misrepresent research participants’ perspectives. The following discussion of the implementation of research method, as well as discussing my response to the ontological issues mentioned earlier, considers ways of ameliorating this epistemological challenge.

Choice of Empirical Research Method

Having considered the metaphysical challenges associated with my research exercise, I will now discuss the method that I adopted and my reasons for selecting this particular approach. I will also discuss how, on the level of procedural detail, I have sought to respond to the ontological and epistemological challenges that this undertaking presents.

A bewildering array of terms has been applied to different research interview methods. Bryman and Bell (2003) provide a helpful overview of these terms, which permits identification of a continuum according to the degree of structure that is imposed by the researcher on the interview discussion. At one end of the continuum is the structured interview, also referred to as a formal interview (Gill and Johnson, 1997) or a standardised interview (Bryman and Bell, 2003), which involves providing each respondent with an identical set of closed questions, delivered in the same order and in the same manner. At the opposite end of the scale is the unstructured interview, which the interviewer approaches with only a loose interview guide and in which the range and sequence of questions are likely to vary considerably between interviews. Various terms have been applied to interviewing styles that fall towards this less structured end of the continuum. These include intensive (Lofland and Lofland, 1995), ethnographic (Spradley, 1979) and qualitative (Mason, 1996).

Lying between the two extremes of, on the one hand, structured/formal/standardised interviews and, on the other hand, unstructured/intensive/ethnographic/qualitative interviews, is a semi-structured approach. For Bryman and Bell, semi-structured interviews are those in which:

the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of the questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference than is typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies (2003: 119).
A relatively unstructured interview approach seemed best suited to my research for two reasons. These reasons relate, firstly, to the purpose of interviews and, secondly, to the establishment of a rapport between the researcher and interviewee that is conducive to that purpose.

Regarding the purpose of the interview, Bryman and Bell (2003) note the efficacy of qualitative interviewing for encouraging rich, detailed answers, observing that more structured approaches are better suited to generating responses that can be coded and processed quickly. Easterby et al suggest that qualitative methods in general are “useful aids or tools to help the respondents think about their own worlds and consider, possibly for the first time, the way they construct their reality” (1991: 71). Citing Rosemary Stewart, Easterby et al describe the main reason for conducting qualitative interviews as being to understand how interviewees construct the meaning and significance of their situation.

Regarding the relationship between the interviewee and researcher, a highly structured approach prioritises the agenda that is set by the researcher (Bryman and Bell, 2003). A tightly ordered interview plan courts the danger of casting the researcher in pole position, relegating the interviewee to the role of compliant provider of data. In such situations,

the interviewer offers nothing in return for the extraction of information...the interviewer-interviewee relationship is a form of hierarchical or power relationship. Interviewers arrogate to themselves the right to ask questions, implicitly placing their interviewees in a position of subservience or inferiority (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 359).

Such an approach is unlikely to be conducive to the relationship of cooperation and trust that is necessary if complex and potentially sensitive issues are to be explored.

However, while such considerations point to the desirability of a relatively loosely-structured approach, it is clear that a degree of structure was necessary for my interviews. While a non-directive style, which permits the interviewee to talk freely without interruption on a loosely-defined topic, may have facilitated candid expression of interviewees' perspectives, Easterby et al (1991) suggest that lack of direction on the part of the researcher may leave interviewees with no clear picture of what aspects of their experience the researcher wishes to explore. While this may enable an uninhibited articulation of certain aspects of the interviewee’s understanding, it may completely fail to address the research topic. But while a measure of structure was necessary, this needed to be applied sympathetically in order to permit digression into areas that were of particular
significance to interviewees. Jones advises that “although researchers are to some extent tied to their frameworks they shouldn’t be ‘tied up by them’” (1985, cited by Easterby et al, 1991: 75). Easterby et al suggest that a topic guide, or agenda should be loosely adhered to, and that the conversation should be pulled back on track if it becomes tangentially diverted into areas that seem unrelated to the central issues.

Of course, it is important to remember that what seems tangential to the researcher may be a vital ingredient to an interviewee’s process of working out and articulating his or her understanding. Indeed, Bryman and Bell note that, “in qualitative interviewing, ‘rambling’ or going off on tangents is often encouraged – it gives insight to what the interviewee sees as relevant and important” (2003: 342). They suggest that not only should researchers permit a degree of digression but that it may even be appropriate to actively encourage tangential exploration. Therefore, researchers should be prepared, on occasions, to ask secondary questions and explore sub-issues that seem to have only a tenuous link to the central issue under consideration. In this respect, Easterby et al (1991) suggest the employment, in a non-leading manner, of a range of probes by the researcher that serve to explore and clarify responses and to sustain dialogue. Similarly, Prasad, (1993, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003) advocates the use of both grand tour and mini tour questions, where broad, explanatory grand tour questions give the interview focus and structure, while mini tour questions facilitate ad-hoc exploration of sub-issues that may be of particular relevance to the research topic.

My approach consisted of equipping myself with a general topic list. Using Prasad’s (ibid) terminology, this comprised a list of grand tour topics, against each of which I wrote some mini-tour questions. My intention was to use these topic lists as an aide-memoire rather than as a script. I generally found that, once I had introduced the discussion with a brief summary of my aims, participants were keen to talk and required little prompting. However, using my topic list for reference, I sometimes steered the conversations when participants seemed to be straying too far from the ethical dimension of leadership. Mini-tour questions were sometimes useful to open up a topic when the interviewee was not initially forthcoming. In keeping with the generally grounded nature of my research, my topic list evolved quite a lot during the course of my research. A copy of the interview guide that I used for my meetings appears as appendix 1.

I discussed earlier the question of whether research discussions should be considered as offering access to a preconceived ethical understanding on the part of research participants or whether they should be viewed as part of the process through which that understanding is
constructed. At the level of implementation, this raises the question of engagement on the part of researchers: to what extent should a researcher become actively engaged in research discussions? On the one hand, interviews might be regarded as a way to “understand the meanings interviewees attach to issues and situations in contexts that are not structured in advance by the researcher’s assumptions” (Easterby et al, 1991: 73). However, in order to achieve this aim, researchers must not only understand and record those meanings; they may also need to assist interviewees in exploring them. In setting out to assist exploration in this way, the researcher inevitably complicates the ontological challenge. Although my key objective in my research interviews was to gain access to the way that interviewees think about leadership and ethics, there is a chance that my participation in the discourse may have shaped that understanding.

McGrath employs the term *dilemmatics* (1982, cited in Gill and Johnson, 1997) to refer to those research choices in which there are no ideal solutions, only a series of compromises. This question of researcher participation might be regarded as one such dilemmatic. On the one hand, active participation may be needed to facilitate the gathering of data; on the other hand, any intervention by the researcher is likely to shape the nature of that data. This particular dilemmatic manifests itself in two specific questions. Firstly, to what extent should researchers respond to and encourage interviewees’ flow of self-expression. Secondly, should researchers try to confirm and summarise points made by interviewees.

Regarding the first of these questions, Easterby *et al* (1991) draw attention to the hazard that verbal and non-verbal responses on the part of researchers might lead interviewees down particular avenues. A stance of detached, disinterested neutrality on the part of researchers might help to avoid this. If researchers listen dispassionately without projecting their reactions onto the discourse, this will permit interviewees to steer the conversation in directions that they consider to be important. However, Easterby *et al* also note that the effectiveness of research interviews depends to a large extent on the ability of the researcher to gain the trust of the interviewee during the discussion. Complete absence of engagement on the part of the researcher is unlikely to be conducive to this essential relationship of trust. An interviewee who is confronted with a blank and unresponsive interlocutor is unlikely to feel sufficiently at ease to give themselves to open self-expression. Furthermore, Easterby *et al* point out that building and maintaining trust is of particular significance in one-off interview situations, in which the researcher and interviewee are unfamiliar to one another. It is also particularly important when the purpose of research is to explore aspects of their experience and understanding to which interviewees are not accustomed to giving open expression. In such situations, an absence
of trust may result in the interviewee simply not telling the researcher what he or she wishes to know.

The second aspect of the engagement-passivity dilemma is the question of whether or not researchers should summarise the points made by the interviewee. On the one hand, it is important for researchers to confirm their understanding of what has been said by interviewees. On the other hand, such clarification and summarizing will necessarily be in accordance with the researcher's personally derived classification of the dialogue, which may not conform precisely to the understanding of the interviewee.

Clearly, my research called for a position of pragmatic compromise in the face of such dilemmatics. It was important to be alert to the possibility that empathic engagement on my part may have shaped the direction that interviews took. However, it was equally apparent that complete absence of engagement would have been just as damaging to the research exercise. Any attempt to eradicate all elements of my own intervention would have been unrealistic. Nevertheless, it was important that the measures that I took to encourage interviewees' flow of self-expression did not steer it. Although empathic and sympathetic responses on my part were needed to build trust and put interviewees at ease, empathy and sympathy had to be expressed in a neutral manner. In particular, I needed to be alert to the temptation to give an overly positive response to contributions that conformed to my own proclivities, or to respond negatively to perspectives with which I felt personally uncomfortable.

Furthermore, while it was necessary, on occasions, to confirm or summarise my understanding of interviewees' perspectives, it was important to do this in such a way that invited confirmation from the interviewee of the accuracy of that understanding. Most importantly, I needed to be alert to the risk of imposing my own perceptions onto the interviewee while confirming my understanding of the meaning contained within their discourse.

Tools to Enhance Qualitative Interviews

Two methods that have been used during business ethics research to support exploration of participants' ethical understanding are scenario methodology and critical incident technique. Both methods invite participants to explore ethical dilemmas. They thus encourage explicit articulation of the tacit assumptions and commitments that underpin participants' ethical understanding. I will outline below the reasons why I considered using
these methods, deciding to opt for the latter and not the former. I will then discuss how repertory grid technique also seems to offer rich potential for revealing peoples' deeper, unarticulated commitments but why I decided not to use it in the present exercise.

Scenario methodology

Scenario methodology is commonly used in business ethics research (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Interviewees are presented with imaginary situations, or vignettes, and are generally asked a number of closed questions to elucidate their likely response should they be confronted with such a scenario. Inferences relating to their ethical sensitivity or their ethical decision making criteria can thus be drawn. The advantage of a vignette over a standard attitude question is that it "anchors the choice in a situation and as such reduces the possibility of an unreflective reply" (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 169). Bryman and Bell cite the example of Lund's (2000) study of marketing professionals. Lund presented respondents with four different vignettes. A closed question relating to each vignette was posed, to which the respondent was asked to select a response, ranging from "definitely would" to "definitely would not", which was indicative of their own likely actions in such a situation. Lund used these responses to draw inferences about the nature of respondents' ethical reasoning.

Asking closed questions about a vignette facilitates comparison and analysis of a large number of responses by quantitative methods. However, the benefits of comparability are achieved at the expense of depth. A simple vignette approach of this nature precludes deeper exploration of the rationales that underpin respondents' choices. A partial compromise was reached by Premeaux (2004), which facilitated some exploration of underpinning rationales. Premeaux used vignettes to assess ethical responses on the part of managers to a selection of hypothetical moral dilemmas that a manager might encounter in a business context. Premeaux invited a two-part response from participating managers. The first part comprised a straight "yes" or "no" answer to the question of whether a manager would choose a certain course of action. In the second part, the respondent was presented with a selection of six rationales from which they were invited to choose the rationale that most aptly justified their response. For Premeaux the choice of rationale indicates whether the manager is driven primarily by a rule-utilitarian, act-utilitarian, rights or justice-oriented rationale. Thus, the study enables identification, in Premeaux's view, firstly, of whether the manager is predisposed to act "ethically" and, secondly, of the ethical system upon which he or she bases his or her decision-making. By adding a choice of rationales to the initial
“yes” or “no” response, Premeaux thus enables a degree of probing into the basis upon which respondents make morally-charged choices.

Building upon Premeaux’s approach by using initial responses as a basis for further discussion would have ameliorated the limitation of closed responses. However, this would not have avoided two other difficulties with scenario methodology. The first of these is that, since scenarios are imaginary and since respondents have no personal relationship with their characters, they can offer rational responses that are untainted by emotional attachment. But ethical decisions tend to concern matters about which we care; were that not the case, then their dilemmatic quality would be absent. It is the emotional tension that real-life ethical dilemmas evoke that makes them difficult. By constructing a hypothetical scenario in which the respondent has no emotional investment we inevitably sanitise that scenario and remove some of its dilemmatic quality. It is therefore unlikely that the responses initiated by vignettes would correspond to those that would be delivered in real life.

A further difficulty with hypothetical scenarios is that, by presenting the respondent with a scenario, the researcher is making the assumption that this scenario would be dilemmatic for the respondent. The researcher is therefore, to some extent, leading the response. Although interviewees are encouraged to focus on aspects of that scenario that they consider to be ethically significant, the assumption is made that the scenario is ethically significant for them in the first place. Some researchers (e.g. Jaffe and Pasternak, 2006; Lund; 2000; Premeaux, 2004) ameliorate this difficulty by devoting resources to the identification of scenarios that are likely to be of particular relevance to respondents. However, ensuring the relevance of scenarios to the research topic does not guarantee their dilemmatic quality. Although scenarios may be of a type that is likely to be encountered by research participants, they will not necessarily present those particular participants with ethical dilemmas.

Given the sample size of these surveys - for example, Premeaux’s study included 431 respondents – scenario methodology, despite its drawbacks, may have been the best available solution. However, to compromise the extent to which research gains access to the worldviews of respondents (Bryman and Bell, 2003) in this way is unnecessary when that research is conducted via interviews with a relatively small number of people. The interview context permits interviewees to select their own ethical dilemmas, thus enabling an even more tailored selection of situations that each particular interviewee regards as ethically charged. I therefore decided against using vignettes, opting for an alternative
approach that accords greater flexibility to research participants in the selection of what they consider to be ethically challenging scenarios.

**Critical incident technique**

Critical incident technique asks interviewees to track back to specific incidents that they have encountered which hold particular relevance for the research topic. Interviewees are asked to describe the incident and are also invited to reflect on related aspects such as the thought processes and emotional responses that they went through at the time, how others responded to the incident, what factors may have shaped their response, what consequences the incident had for themselves and for others, how they felt about the incident later and how they feel about it now.

The seminal application of critical incident technique by Herzberg et al (1959) comprised part of a quantitative research undertaking. However, its subsequent contribution to many qualitative studies (Bryman and Bell, 2003), where it has been used to facilitate exploration of the principles that impact on decision-making, indicates its suitability for my purpose. During my research discussions, I therefore, asked interviewees to identify particular situations within their personal experience that have presented ethical dilemmas. I was then able to explore, through secondary questioning, matters such as the nature of their decision-making processes in these situations, any factors that may have inhibited their decision, the extent to which their response to such incidents may have changed within different circumstances, and the reasons for such changes. In an attempt to explore the extent and manner of intersubjective decision making, I also explored the extent to which such dilemmas were discussed with significant others.

A major advantage of critical incident technique over hypothetical scenarios is that it permits respondents to focus on situations that have presented them with ethical dilemmas, rather than commenting on imposed hypothetical scenarios that may or may not have been dilemmatic for that particular respondent. Indeed, the nature of the critical incidents that respondents choose to relate may, in itself, offer valuable insights to their ethical perspectives.

In using critical incident technique, a decision needed to be made on the question of whether to ask interviewees to think about incidents in advance of the meeting. The disadvantage of doing so is that prior consideration may have impaired the spontaneity of the interviewee’s response. The advantage of doing so is that it optimises the limited time
available for the meeting. Curran and Blackburn (1994, cited by Bryman and Bell, 2003) took the latter option and found that, by sending potential critical incident themes to respondents prior to the meeting, more detailed narratives were elicited than would have been possible had the subjects been raised for the first time during the meeting. Alternatively, the decision of whether or not to prepare responses could be left to the respondent; Bryman and Bell (2003) note that it is common practice to provide a copy of the interview guide on request.

The approach that I took was, after making initial contact with research participants by telephone or by email, to write to them, giving a clear account of my research objectives and of what I expected to achieve during the interview. I explicitly stated my intention to explore any ethical dilemmas that the interviewees may have encountered. This, I felt, offered them the opportunity to reflect broadly on morally problematic scenarios without being asked to specifically select critical incidents in advance of the meeting. In alerting them to my intention to explore critical incidents, I was alert to possibility that their discussion of these incidents may have been rehearsed. Had this been the case, I would have withdrawn mention of dilemmas in my letter. However, participants' treatment of dilemmas seemed fairly spontaneous, so this was not necessary.

As well spending part of each interview focusing on a particular critical incident, I also encouraged research participants more generally to offer examples drawn from their personal experience to illustrate conceptual articulations of their moral understanding. This, I felt, assisted the epistemological challenge of imaginatively occupying (MacIntyre, 1988) the moral perspectives that they were expressing.

Repertory grid technique

A third technique that I considered was repertory grid technique, which is based on George Kelly's (1991 [1955]) personal construct theory. Despite its origins in personal construct theory, it is not necessary to accept the psychological presuppositions of Kelly's theory in order to derive the benefits of repertory grid technique (Fransella et al, 2004). Indeed, it has been applied in a wide range of milieu "to identify the interpretive processes whereby an individual constructs meaning in relation to his or her social context" (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 131).

Given its potential for "enabling in-depth discussion and thinking about a topic" (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 134) and encouraging interviewees to verbalise constructs that might
otherwise remain hidden (Easterby et al, 1991), repertory-grid technique seemed well suited to facilitating articulation of interviewees' ethical understanding. Furthermore, since it elucidates an exposition of the research subject's understanding of the topic on their own terms, avoiding the "laying of [the researcher's] thinking on to them" (Jankowicz, 2004: 11), it seemed particularly apposite to the interpretive nature of my enquiry.

I therefore set out to incorporate a repertory grid exercise in my research discussions, using it to identify bi-polar constructs which define respondents understanding of ethical leadership. Prior to commencing my empirical research, I used repertory grid technique with groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students to explore their understanding of ethical leadership. This met with mixed results. Putting the difficulties encountered down to the fact that I was relying upon students to play the parts of interviewees and interviewers, with insufficient preparation for the latter to fulfil their role, I resolved to incorporate the method into my trial interviews. This also brought mixed results. The process was very time-consuming and, although my trial interviewees reported that they had found it fairly interesting, they did not engage with it as enthusiastically as they did with loosely structured discussion. I used repertory grids again in my first interview. Since the interviewee was a personal acquaintance I was able to debrief him after the meeting. He reported that he had enjoyed our discussion but had found the repertory grid exercise tedious and cumbersome.

These difficulties may have been due to my inexperience with repertory grid technique. Perhaps a practiced interviewer may have been able to use it more productively and more time-efficiently in my research context. However, given the time-bound nature of my interviews I decided not to persevere with repertory grid technique. Although it offers interesting possibilities for facilitating people's ethical understanding, its use in my interviews would have cut down on the time available for less structured discussion. Since the latter seemed to be the most productive, it was on this that I decided to concentrate.

Other Procedural Issues Relating to Empirical Research

Encouraging cooperation from participants

Easterby et al (1991) suggest some measures that might be adopted by researchers to establish credibility, to build trust and to elicit cooperation from interviewees. The first of these measures is to familiarise oneself with as much information as possible about the participant prior to the interview. Not only will this save time during the interview, it will
also contextualise the conversation, helping the interviewer to understand what the interviewee is saying on his or her own terms (Bryman and Bell, 2003). I therefore resolved to carry out desk research about each interviewee prior to our meetings. This proved quite productive. Due to the high profile of many of my research participants, I was able to access quite a lot of relevant information via the internet. There is, of course, a risk that possession of such biographical detail may have evoked pre-conceptions on my part about the interviewees. However, given the need to make optimum use of limited amount of time that respondents were able to devote to interviews, I decided to take that risk.

The second of Easterby et al’s (1991) suggestions is that researchers carry out pre-interview telephone familiarisation. This, they propose, enables the establishment of voice contact and helps the interview to start on the right note. However, the benefits of enthusiastic telephone familiarisation need to be reconciled with the practicalities of gaining access to participants and also with the hazard of taking up too much of a busy interviewee’s time. For my earlier interviews, where I had initially been introduced to the research participant via a third party, I commenced with a brief telephone or email exchange, following this up with a letter outlining my research objectives and my specific aims in relation to research discussions. For my later interviews, where I contacted participants “cold” without a third party introduction, this formal letter comprised my opening communication to them. This I followed with a telephone call. These follow up telephone conversations were, with one exception, fielded by participants’ personal assistants. Therefore, in these cases, no prior familiarisation with the participant was possible. All my formal letters to participants were written on Business School notepaper in response to Easterby et al’s (ibid) suggestion for establishing researcher’s credibility. A copy of one of my letters of introduction appears as appendix 2.

Thirdly, Easterby et al (1991) highlight the importance of using appropriate terminology. Describing myself as a “student” may have implied an amateurish inquiry in the eyes of potential interviewees, whereas “researcher” suggests a more professional relationship. Referring to the meetings as an “interviews” might have given the impression of a formal, structured interrogation that is controlled by the researcher. I therefore used the term “discussion”, which suggests a less threatening, more relaxed encounter. Choice of terminology is also important with regard to subject matter (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Within the present context, the language of ethics theory may have held little meaning for respondents, so I avoided using it during interviews.
Fourthly, Easterby et al (1991) highlight the importance of venue. They suggest that a neutral venue is likely to be preferable to the interviewee’s workplace, in which the discussion may be subject to interruption. They also suggest that interviewees may feel more relaxed away from their workplace. A relatively discreet setting is also likely to be conducive to frank expression of views on the part of the interviewee. Bryman and Bell (2003) also stress the importance, when audio taping interviews, of choosing a venue that is free of extraneous noise that may impair the quality of the recording. In response to Easterby et al’s suggestions, I initially sought to arrange neutral venues. However, perhaps due to the status of these research participants in their organizations, I found that their workplaces actually offered more discreet and tranquil settings than hotel lobbies.

**Recording discussions**

Bryman and Bell (2003) note several benefits of an accurate record of meetings. This enables thorough and repeated examination of content by the researcher. It also opens up the data to others who may wish to audit or share it. Furthermore, it permits data to be reused in other ways to those intended by the original researcher, or in the light of different perspectives.

Videotaping is helpful for capturing non-verbal as well as verbal discourse. Garcia and Button (1991 and 1992 respectively, both cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003) have used videotaping in the interests of discourse analysis. However, in both cases, the process of videotaping was facilitated by the fact that the researcher did not actively participate in the taped discussions. The logistic challenges presented by videotaping were prohibitive in the present context.

Audio taping is more commonly used, providing a comprehensive and cost-effective record of verbal discourse that can be subsequently transcribed. Unlike note taking, audio taping permits the researcher to give full attention to the discourse. Like videotaping, audio taping may cause some anxiety for interviewees. However, Bryman and Bell (2003) note that people generally loosen up after initial anxiety about recorders. Easterby et al (1991) and Gill and Johnson (1997) find that managers, in particular, are rarely self-conscious about being recorded and tend to soon forget about the recorder. Indeed, Gill and Johnson suggest that, for this reason, taping tends to cause less anxiety then note taking, which remains at the forefront of the respondent’s awareness throughout the discussion and is therefore even more likely to inhibit frank expression. I therefore chose to audiotape discussions.
Gill and Johnson (1997) suggest that anxiety about taping might be reduced if responsibility for switching on-and-off the tape recorder is handed to the interviewee. However, I did not feel that this was necessary or, given the sophisticated nature of digital recorders, practical. I did, though, inform interviewees in my introductory letter of my wish to record meetings. I then sought, at the start of the discussion, their permission for me to do this and informed them when I was switching the recorder on and off. I encountered neither opposition to nor apparent discomfort about audio taping. In several cases, participants initiated the continuation of conversation after I had turned off the recorder. In two particular cases, a great deal of interesting supplementary data was offered off-record. However, since an accurate record of this data was lacking, I did not include it in my analysis.

Gill and Johnson (1997) also suggest that trust may be engendered if the interviewee is given the opportunity to read transcripts of the audiotape and any field notes that are subsequently written up. I therefore asked each participant if they would like a copy of the transcript of the interview but only one person took up my offer.

Data Analysis

So much for the method that I adopted to encourage research participants to share with me their understanding of the ethical challenges associated with organizational leadership. Having outlined that method and discussed some of the challenges that it presented, I will now turn to the closely related issue of data analysis. Bryman and Bell observe that qualitative research often tends to be iterative in that it is characterised by a “repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data” (2003: 425). The iterative nature of **grounded theory** permits an approach that cannot be described as either purely deductive or entirely inductive. Instead, it is characterised by an incremental progression, whereby each stage of data collection facilitates theoretical reflection and redefinition of subsequent empirical focus. Thus, research may begin around relatively loosely defined objectives, which are gradually refined as the project evolves. As empirical data is gathered, it is integrated with preliminary theoretical perspectives, thus redefining the focus of subsequent empirical encounters.

Accordingly, my empirical exercise had a deductive quality insofar as it followed on from a precursory exploration of relevant theory. That exploration had provided it with a tentative structure, which comprised a number of themes that seemed to hold resonance for the research topic. By themes, I mean a number of headings which had emerged from my prior exploration of the leadership literature and from my consideration of the leadership-related
implications of various theoretical ethics perspectives. The terms *concept* or *category* could be applied to these themes, although given the ambiguities and definitional difficulties surrounding these labels (Bryman and Bell, 2003) I will stick with "themes".

Equally, the project has an inductive quality insofar as empirical enquiry expanded and provided focus to that preliminary theoretical framework. Thus, the themes that had crystallised during theoretical exploration evolved during empirical enquiry. Furthermore, additional themes emerged, waxed and waned during my research discussions. The emergent theoretical understanding was deductively applied to subsequent empirical enquiry, and so on.

All of my interviews were transcribed by a third party and I began data analysis by reading through the transcripts while listening to the recordings24 of the interviews. This served two purposes. Firstly, it enabled me to correct errors in the transcribing. Since I sent each interview for transcription immediately after the interview, I was usually able to review the transcripts within a week or so of recording. The discussions were therefore fresh in my memory so I was well placed to correct any transcriptional misunderstandings.

The second benefit of reading through the transcripts while listening to and correcting the recordings is that this provided a welcome vitality to the first stage of coding. I roughly followed the stages of coding suggested by Bryman and Bell (2003), where open coding is understood as the "process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003: 429). This initial stage, as Bryman and Bell suggest, involved "reading through [the] initial set of transcripts ... without taking any notes or considering an interpretation" before making "a few general notes about what had struck [me] as especially interesting, important or significant" (ibid: 435). I found that carrying out this first stage with simultaneous visual and audio brought the interviews back to life in a way that just reading the transcripts failed to do. I also used this simultaneous approach at later stages of data analysis to help to avoid de-contextualisation (see below).

My second stage of coding involved reading again through a transcript, making, as suggested by Bryman and Bell "marginal notes about significant remarks or observations" (ibid: 435). This I did using the "insert comment" function on a standard Microsoft Word

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24 My first six interviews were recorded on a traditional cassette recorder. The remaining ten were recorded using a digital recorder.
These notes were guided partly by the themes that had already evolved through an iterative interplay between theory and prior data analysis; partly by issues that may have appeared for the first time in the transcript under consideration and which seemed to be particularly relevant to the research agenda.

My next stage of coding comprised the compilation of what are sometimes referred to as concept cards (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In my case, this consisted of a separate Word document relating to each theme onto which I copied and pasted excerpts from each transcript that related to that particular theme. Passages of conversation often held resonance for several different themes, so I often pasted one section of data onto several different concept cards. These concept cards were under continuous review: new cards were added as additional themes emerged during ongoing analysis; cards were also removed as I sometimes combined several themes onto one card. Twice during my research I carried out a major review of coding: after three interviews and after eleven interviews. This included the creation of “secondary order cards” (Prasad, 1993 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003: 430), which consolidated the earlier concept cards in the light of relationships that were emerging between different themes. Subsequent interviews were then conducted against the framework of these consolidated themes, which were further augmented and shaped in response to new data.

The above might be construed as a straightforward, clinical, linear process. In actuality, it was tortuously dialectical, involving a constantly troubled quest for theoretical relevance as I attempted to steer a passage between the Scylla of a purely descriptive hermeneutic and the Charybdis of a personally derived schema. Alert to the epistemological challenges already discussed, my early attempts to theorise the data strayed too far towards pure description, with lengthy, unedited passages of data making heavy demands on the reader and saying little of theoretical interest. Furthermore, in seeking to avoid the charge of massaging data into a preconceived framework, I struggled to synthesise the empirical with the theoretical. The eventual outcome, which appears in the three chapters of my empirical report, was achieved by adopting a more redactional stance in relation to the data: I came to terms with the need to edit and annotate the data in order to set up a worthwhile dialogue between theory and empirical material.

25 I researched the possibility of using a qualitative data analysis software package but decided against this. There were several reasons for this; partly cost-related and partly related to the difficulties associated with learning to use a complicated new software package. But most importantly, I found no need for sophisticated software: Microsoft Word seemed well suited to my needs.
However, in doing this it was very important to remain vigilant in relation to the coding approach that I had adopted. This hazard is that the coding of data involves extracting passages from transcripts, which inevitably courts the challenge of de-contextualisation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003). By considering a fragment of data away from its narrative context, the problem of interpretive accuracy, and consequently of its misappropriation, is inevitably exacerbated. I sought to ameliorate this difficulty by frequently referencing sections of data back to their original context. In this respect, I found it particularly helpful to re-read transcripts whilst simultaneously listening to original recordings of interviews.

Concluding Comments

In summary, my empirical research comprised sixteen interviews with organizational leaders, each lasting for between sixty and ninety minutes and delivering a total of 127,000 words of data. These interviews were conducted using a loosely structured approach. I adopted a grounded approach to the gathering and analysis of data. Evaluation of empirical research and its integration with theoretical enquiry was therefore carried out on an ongoing basis. Any significant themes that emerged during a particular empirical encounter contributed to the agenda of subsequent encounters, permitting gradual evolution of the research focus. The outcome of this exercise comprises the three chapters of the empirical report that follows. This report discusses the empirical data in relation to a number of themes that had either emerged from my precursory theoretical research or that had arisen during the course of empirical enquiry. In both cases, these themes were subject to continual revision and refocus during ongoing accumulation and analysis of data.
5.0 PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

Introduction

The following three chapters comprise a report of my discussions with sixteen people who occupy, or have occupied, prominent formal leadership roles in work organizations. I have made use of the theoretical research already discussed in order to provide a framework for this report.

The report comprises three sections. The first chapter draws upon discussions with three particular research participants in order to illustrate some contrasting ways of thinking about ethics and leadership. To adopt a Weberian phrase, I am offering the discourses of these people as representative of three different ideal types. Each of these perspectives resonates with one of the meta-ethical stances discussed in the preceding ethics literature review. However, each also departs from its meta-ethical counterpart in important respects. Despite these points of divergence, I expect this exercise to aid reflection on some of the implications of the various meta-ethical perspectives. The chapter also includes a brief introduction to the background and present status of each of the three participants whose perspectives are discussed within it. This enables reflection on the possibility that the ideal type understanding that each articulates is, to some extent, shaped by his respective organizational context.

The second chapter pursues this threefold classification further, examining in greater detail a particular characteristic of each of these three discourses. I have selected these particular characteristics for two reasons: firstly, because each is particularly relevant to the application of its corresponding meta-ethical perspective to the realm of organizational leadership; secondly because each characteristic helps to illuminate a particular tension that is associated with the application of its corresponding meta-ethical perspective. I will discuss these characteristics and explore the associated tensions, drawing upon discussions with the other thirteen people who participated in my research. I thus expect to add further insights to the implications of applying different meta-ethical understandings to the organizational leadership domain. I include, at the beginning of this second chapter, a description these thirteen other participants.

26 I have changed the names of these people and of the organizations that they work for in order to preserve their anonymity.
27 As with the three already introduced, I have used pseudonyms in all references to these people.
The third chapter of this empirical report looks at how research participants think about the areas of moral concern that I identified at the beginning of this thesis and which I have already discussed in the leadership literature review. That is, it examines how participants evaluate the moral probity of the objectives towards which they lead and how they respond to the inherently repressive quality of leadership. I thus intend to shed some more light on the extent to which different approaches to leadership may or may not respond to these concerns. I will also reflect on a related theme: some contrasting approaches that might be taken to the agency of the leader.

This empirical report will prepare the way for my concluding chapter. In this conclusion, I propose to pull together the various aspects of my theoretical and empirical research in order to generate a normative conception of ethical leadership.
5.1 IDENTIFYING THREE IDEAL TYPES: THE COMPANY MAN, THE MORAL CRUSADER AND THE MEDIATOR OF COMMUNICATION

This chapter focuses on leaders' self-understanding of the part that they play in establishing the moral tone of the organization. I will outline the perspectives articulated by three different research participants. I have selected these particular participants for two reasons. The first reason is that each is particularly expressive of his moral understanding. All of the individuals who participated in the research exercise expressed an interest in morality; indeed their willingness to participate might be taken as an indication of the seriousness with which they treat this dimension of their leadership role. However, I gained the impression that some were more preoccupied with that dimension than others. The three people that I will discuss in this chapter are amongst that group.

The second reason that I have chosen to focus on these three individuals is that each articulates a very different understanding of his role in setting and implementing his organization's moral agenda. I expect these differences to become apparent as the chapter progresses. It will also become apparent that these three participants occupy leadership roles in very different organizational contexts. I will discuss later the extent to which these contextual differences may account for the contrasting perspectives that these participants articulate.

In identifying three ways of thinking about the moral role of the leader, I am not suggesting that these are the only ways of thinking about that role. However, each differs sufficiently from the others to provide some interesting and insightful contrasts. There are some parallels between these three stances and the different meta-ethical perspectives discussed in the last section. Therefore, considering these three individuals may offer a basis for additional reflection on the implications of each of these perspectives.

David: the Company Man

David works as Managing Director of the UK Division of Rutherford, a global supplier of food-based products. Rutherford is one of the world's largest privately owned corporations and its founding family continues to exercise a strong influence on its affairs.

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28 It would have been more gender-neutral to use the term "Company Person". However, since the person who approximates most closely to this ideal type is male, since none of the women with whom I spoke approximate to it at all and since it seems to carry greater rhetorical elegance, I have chosen to stick with "Company Man".
I sensed a little defensiveness on behalf of Rutherford at the beginning of my conversation with David. Despite my reassurance that I was primarily interested in exploring his views, I think he may have perceived my approach as a potential attack on the company’s CSR profile. This might be explained by the contentious nature of Rutherford’s core UK product (intensively reared poultry) or by the fact that, as David related towards the end of our conversation, the global business is currently embroiled in a PR scuffle with a major NGO concerning usage of environmentally sensitive land. This defensiveness may account for David’s eagerness to orientate our conversation towards Rutherford, its systems and its values rather than dwelling on his personal moral perspective.

However, an alternative explanation of David’s Rutherford-focussed discourse is that he perceives his own moral understanding as deeply embedded within that of the organization. David clearly feels very comfortable operating within Rutherford’s value systems; he struck me as very much a “Company Man” (he wore a sports shirt bearing the company’s logo at our meeting). In the following narrative he proudly describes the high profile that morality occupies within the company’s decision-making processes. He also refers to the importance of his personal values being in harmony with those that the organization espouses.

How come you picked us then? How come you selected us?

Well, what I am keen to do is just speak to people like yourself - the fact that you’re involved in Rutherford is immaterial really, that’s purely coincidental ... I’m not necessarily interested in Rutherford’s corporate social responsibility policies. What I am interested in is how you think about the moral challenges that the leadership role presents. So it’s you as a leader rather than this particular organization.

Aha.

But, obviously there is going to be a bit of a linkage between the two.

Well hopefully one reflects the other, otherwise you’re a fish out of water in your organization.

Presumably, yes. Now clearly, in your role, you are expected to show leadership to a large number of people - is it over two thousand employees you have here?

Yes, yes.
Is the ethics of that something that you think about? Is it something you spend time thinking about?

Well it's a good point actually because the answer is yes. And this is where you can't avoid the corporate, the culture of the corporation ... because Rutherford, one of Rutherford's fundamental values and one of its building blocks to work with in this organization and what it believes is its success over a hundred-and-thirty, hundred-and-forty years is its ethics. So Rutherford have very strong ethical values and ensure that the employees understand those.... As it's got bigger and bigger and more global, we have a set of behaviours that we all sign up to as employees. And what it says is that even though we are a global company, eighty countries, all that kind of stuff, here is a set of values that this business is going to operate by.

And to be fair it then picks, I guess it's automatic selection between what people want, i.e. people like myself who choose this organization to stay with, plus the values that the organization brings. There's almost like a marriage that says we compliment each other because Rutherford won't put someone in a leadership position that doesn't exhibit the [organisations prescribed] behaviours. But equally the people in those leadership positions feel comfortable with that constraint of those behaviours.

... So there's almost a marriage as you develop through the organization. So, to be fair, ethics, it's much more of a, it's not a bolt on. It's more endemic as one of the core cultural behaviours of Rutherford, I would say. Probably more so than a lot of organizations. A lot of organizations talk about ethics; I've never really seen it be so consistently applied as it is in Rutherford. It is quite amazing really. Now is it something consciously that people wander around thinking about all the time? No it's almost like, it gets to a point where it's like breathing; it's like the functions of your body. It's just something that happens automatically because it's what you do. And the right of it is, if you cut to the chase, if I make a big mistake that costs this business a million pounds, I'll be forgiven, quite frankly. If I do something unethical, I'll be sacked.

David goes on to describe how Rutherford's values are established from the centre; by the Rutherford "family". He also relates the steps that the company has recently taken to formalise and communicate its moral code and to ensure that its members adhere to that code.

You mention there that it is very important that all the employees understand those values. But where do those values come from in the first place?
I think to be, the reality of it is, from Rutherford. They are passed down from generation to generation. Rutherford is a family-owned business so the family determine: this is what we are about; this is what we are; yes, it's different to everybody else, but this is what makes us. That gets passed through the organization through very well communicated briefings, documentation, just reinforcement.... Some of those values were implied for many, many years they've been implied and they've been passed down.

So by implied you mean that they hadn't been formalised?

Precisely. About ten years ago [Rutherford] actually formalised some of those values and made a much, much better job of saying actually, you know, we are on a big growth strategy. That means that we acquire businesses. That means that people need to understand that when we acquire them and when we do our due diligence: ... yes, we look at numbers; yes, we look at plants; but we also look at the culture; we look at the ethical values; we look at the safety; we look at their past history on environmental. I mean we put a lot more emphasis on those kind of things ... you know: what's your level of safety; what's the culture like; do people tell lies; have we got outstanding issues with local governments, with regulatory bodies? And we put a huge amount of effort into that because Rutherford doesn't necessarily want to be stood there saying “you guys are running a sweat shop, you guys are doing this, you're doing things unethically, you’re doing things behind the door”. [Rutherford] tends to be very, very, you know, very, very open and transparent about those things.

And because we have a big growth strategy as Rutherford world-wide, it needed to be more formalised to give people boundaries to operate in ... When we bought businesses, people needed to know what they were letting themselves in for regarding the way Rutherford does business. So that was much more formalised about ten years ago. And programmes were set up within Rutherford to really explain to people what Rutherford's culture is and what it wants to be, what it's ethical values stand for, what it's leadership responsibilities are, what the behaviours that we would like to see in our culture, the expected behaviours are and that kind of thing.

Ok. So the impression I'm getting is that the values are something which are shaped from the top of the organization. And then anybody that comes in for any form of relationship with the organization; whether it be another company which you bring in and incorporate under –

Oh, we'd entirely expect them to follow -

Or whether it's an employee, they will be expected to conform to those values.
Absolutely ... We all sign documents every year to say we are going to conform to certain levels, standards and ethics.

To a large extent, then, David perceives the moral legitimacy of his own leadership conduct as deriving from its congruence with the company’s ethical code. He is clearly very comfortable with Rutherford’s values and he is happy to measure his own conduct in relation to them.

Where does David’s confidence in the moral probity of Rutherford’s values derive from; why is he so convinced that the company’s moral code offers a sound basis for moral behaviour on his part? The answer to this question seems to relate partly to the apparent seriousness with which the organization treats ethics and the significance that it accords to the moral dimension in its commercial decision-making processes. That the organization cares about morality and that it cares enough to have reflected upon and formalised a set of behavioural principles seems, for David, to convey a certain amount of legitimacy upon those principles; that his company is ethically sensitised ensures the moral probity of its actions.

However, other, slightly different, although related, reasons for David’s confidence in Rutherford’s moral code are hinted at by his response to my specific question about the legitimacy of its values:

So how can people be sure that the values that Rutherford stands for are the right values morally?

I think it’s, I mean they’re not rocket science, to be fair, they are pretty basic but they are not exactly rocket science. But I think on the basis of the feedback we get here, people feel comfortable with those values.

David’s observation that Rutherford’s values are “not rocket science” suggests that he considers the identification of moral rightness to be a fairly straightforward task, at least insofar as the identification of a minimal code of behaviour is concerned. His assumption seems to be that fundamental principles of right and wrong are easily discernible through the application of common sense and that a moral business is one which follows these self-evident principles instead of allowing other considerations to get in their way. So, by placing the emphasis on morality that it does, Rutherford is thereby a moral business.
Furthermore, by leading in a manner which is congruent with these self-evidently right values, David is confident that he will be leading ethically.

A further interesting aspect is David’s reference to the importance of consistency, a subject to which he returned several times during our conversation. There seem to be several interrelated strands to David’s approbation of consistency. Firstly, he believes that consistent fealty to altruistically-oriented moral principles, even when these principles conflict with self-interest or organizational performance, is morally desirable.

And it’s just like watching on TV all the politicians; why do people get pissed off with the politicians? Because they are not consistent. You know, what people consider to be good, strong core values, they expect certain people to operate within that parameter. And when they are not consistent that’s when they lose trust ... I think if you are consistent, if the people think you are looking after their interests not just the interests of your self or the organization. You know, if you do what you say you are going to do and you execute well, I think people are going to trust you. And I think that whole issue about are you looking after their interests as much as looking after your own interests is a big part of it.

David also dwells the importance of consistency when asked about the part played by employees in the definition of corporate values. As far as David is concerned, employees have little interest in such participation. For them, what is important is that corporate values are consistently implemented; not that they are able to contribute to the definition of those values:

Do they get an opportunity to contribute? You mention that the values have evolved to a certain extent; do people in the organization get the opportunity to contribute to that evolution?

Well, it is Rutherford that sits right up there and it says: “this is what, these are the behaviours we want around the world”. ... But basis our experience here, this word consistency crops up a lot whenever I do these kinds of things [i.e. conduct employee feedback] and talk to our employees. Because above all they want to be consistent: ... the feedback we get is “we don’t care if you are as tough as old boots and we don’t care if you are as nice as pie. But please be consistent because what we can’t handle is when one week you are nice to Jo and the next week you are bad to Bill. We don’t know where you are coming from”. So that inconsistency then allows people to play games, it allows management to do different things and what you can’t have is inconsistency regarding the values of the management and the values of the supervisors.
Yes. So I'm getting the impression that the employees, for them, it is more important that, whatever values the company has, they are consistently applied-

Absolutely.

Than that they get the opportunity to contribute to the evolution of those values.

And I'll come back to the contribution because we do call them in. But I think it's important that it doesn't matter where you sit in the organization, I think you need to know what is and is not acceptable. And so, I think when people know what is and is not acceptable and what's expected of them it makes your life easier at work. Because then you can just concentrate on doing your work, because you know you are going to be consistently treated with everybody else. If people don't know what's expected of them and it's a free-for-all and actually when I do cross over that white line, we might get penalised versus someone in a different factory get penalised, because he's got a different manager than I have got. That creates a lot of confusion and creates a lot of management time when it goes wrong. So being consistent, having the employees know what's expected of them and what they should expect from the organization, I think is a pretty fundamental part and foundation of any business.

David's insouciance about employee participation in value definition is perhaps another indication that, for him, moral rectitude is self-evident: corporate values are so obviously right that there can be no reason why employees should want to participate in their definition. Employees only concern is that those abundantly obvious standards of ethical rectitude are consistently applied by management. Employees thus expect consistency in the treatment of different people in different parts of the organization by different managers. They also expect consistency in the conduct of any particular manager. And in both respects, those who occupy leadership roles have an important part to play: their consistent application of the organization's moral code is critical to its perpetuation:

In my view, because you can pass down whatever memos you want from the top, it means Jack Shit unless the living organisms of the company; the bosses, the managers, the employees within it unless you actually - people just mimic behaviour, so if you've got a boss who says one thing and does another you are going to have chaos. If you have a boss who lives certain values, no matter what they are, whether it's, you know; we'll do we what we say, whether we'll treat people properly, whether we'll have recognition processes, whether we're consistent in how we manage people, you know, some of the core values I stand for, people see them and say is he consistent in the application of those values? And if
he is, then I think people mirror that behaviour. But personally I think a lot of it is consistency.

For David, then, there is a mutually supportive relationship between organizational values and organizational leadership: on the one hand, the values offer a template of moral rectitude for leaders within the organization to follow; on the other hand, the perpetuation of those values demands their consistent exemplification in the behaviour of those leaders. The values support the leaders and the leaders support the values; the consequence of this relationship of reciprocal support is a virtuous spiral of moral probity.

To summarise, I have highlighted several themes from David’s discourse. These themes offer an insight to his understanding of morality in relation to his leadership role. The first is that he orientates his moral leadership compass in accordance with the espoused values of the organization. He feels very comfortable with the organization and with its moral code and understands moral leadership as comprising consistent application of that code.

The second feature is that the importance which Rutherford appears to attach to ethics reassures David of the moral probity of its values. Since the apprehension of moral rightness is a relatively straightforward matter, a company which permits this self-evident moral template to direct its decision-making is likely to be a moral company. Consistent application of an ethically-responsive company’s moral agenda therefore offers a dependable template for moral leadership.

A third feature of David’s moral understanding is that he considers consistency, in itself, to be a virtue. Consistent application of commonly shared behavioural principles, particularly in the face of self-interested or commercial imperatives which compete with these principles, is therefore an important ingredient to ethical leadership.

A fourth feature, which follows from the self-evident nature of morality, is that there is scant need for companies to engage in critical reflection and debate about morality. If the definition of appropriate values is, as David suggests, “not rocket science”, then companies who aspire to ethicality need devote few resources to moral soul-searching. Furthermore, there is little point in involving employees in the definition of the company’s moral agenda. Since moral probity is a relatively straightforward matter, company’s have no need to consult about the content of their moral agenda. Instead, they should focus their efforts on communicating and enforcing a code of conduct that instantiates those self-evident moral truths.
James: the Moral Crusader

James is Executive Vice President (UK) of a global, US-based, executive travel company. His role carries overall responsibility for the company's UK business. At the time of our meeting, he had been in this post for a little over a year. He previously worked in a number of other managing directorship and board roles, mainly within the travel industry.

James stated at the start of our conversation that he does not tend to think explicitly about morality but that it nevertheless occupies a prominent role in the way in which he fulfils his leadership responsibilities:

I've realised that a lot of, I guess, my values, a lot of what I try and do in terms of my style and what I try to bring to the business, is about [morality] but I have never sort of thought about that as "okay, this is my morality bit" because it's not a word I would necessarily always use. But the elements of it, and there are many, many elements of it, would all be things that are probably very important to me and are probably a lot of the values that I know I have brought to this business in the last year relative to my predecessors. So, yeah, I don't sort of package it like that but it's a part, I guess, [of] what things are important.

The core message of this opening statement was reinforced throughout our conversation. This is that James attaches a great deal of importance to morality and, although he may not conceptualise it in theoretical terms, he takes the moral dimension of leadership very seriously. His willingness to assist with my research seemed to derive from a genuine interest in the subject and how it relates to his role. He was keen to share his reflections and experiences in a frank and open manner.

It is also apparent that James has a great deal of confidence in his own moral agenda and that he is highly committed to pursuing that agenda. This is evident from the way in which he talks about the definition and implementation of corporate values. Like David, James reflects how the moral conduct of members of the organization should conform to a shared behavioural code. However, whereas David emphasises the role of the company's founding family in shaping that code, James dwells on the part played by the leader:

Who decides what those, you know, what's important? Who should decide what is important morally for businesses? Who should be making those decisions about which are the morally significant subjects?
I think the leadership of the company. I am not just on about the individual and myself, there is also a team responsibility in terms of the Senior Board. And it is, I think, in any company it is absolutely the style of the leader and it's then the style of the leadership team that definitely influences and creates a culture across the business. And so it is incredibly important that as a team you recognise that and I always say to my team, you know it's about the shadow that we create. It's the aura that we create as a culture, its how we behave together and if we slag each other off then that's the culture you create and it goes all the way down to the bottom. But actually if we are, you know, then it comes back to like respect for each other and integrity, honesty. Not shafting people in the back. All of those sort of things that can go on.

Yeah ok, so what you are suggesting there is that –

The leadership team is responsible for it.

I returned to this theme a little later in our conversation. Again, James emphasises the role played by leaders in shaping the moral tone of an organization. Although junior employees may play a small part, the key moral shapers must be the people at the top:

To put it in fairly blunt terms, what I am getting the impression of is a fairly top-down management approach. You know, the role of the leadership is to define the moral agendas and to define the responses that we should be taking in those moral agendas. Is that the way that you tend to run the business? Is that your general approach?

No, I’m not autocratic in that sense. And actually my style is changing this year because I came in a year ago and there was a lot that needed to change and I was much more hands-on and directional if you like... I think a lot of what you are asking about, though, does come from the top. You know, the personality of a business is often, you can often see where it comes from by looking at the leader of the company. And that can be in a very small company. You can see it much more visibly. Or it can be a large company. ... So there is a top-down which is that if you behave like that, you instil a style that you hope that people like and they respond to that and then they try and do it. It cascades down. ... And coming up from the bottom there is an element; but a lot of it, a lot of it has to come from the top, particularly on this [moral] agenda.

James offers two examples of the significance of leadership in shaping the organizations moral tone. Firstly, he contrasts the moral climate that he has developed with that encouraged by his predecessor. Such is the moral potency of leadership that, even in a relatively short tenure, he has succeeded in driving some fundamental changes:
We'd been a sleeping giant for about five years in this company and it was, if you looked at the manager, the MD who was here, you could understand why because he's a bit of a sleeper and it's just his style and everything about him; he has absolutely zero energy or motivational dynamism or whatever else; he hadn't really had control of his team. The standards therefore had fallen. ... There had been a bit of a drinking culture going on with some of the senior team and some people were definitely abusing trips we get offered by airlines and so on: it was always the same people with their wives going away. Well we stopped all of that and we've injected a momentum and a belief and a different culture in our business.

A second example is James's description of someone he holds out as a role model of moral leadership. His account is notable for its depiction of Stuart Rose [CEO of Marks and Spencer] as having unilaterally defined and imposed Marks and Spencer's environmental policy. James's description allows little space for the possibility that that company's stance in relation to a morally sensitive issue may have been developed in consultation with others:

Stuart Rose of Marks and Spencer announced recently that they were going to go carbon-neutral and that would mean a dramatic change in everything that they did. He was very honest about it and it was shortly after the Stern Report had come out and he said, "I read the Stern Report and I read the news and I heard it on the radio and everything else" and he said, "I felt that I had a responsibility because I could influence it. I had a responsibility and we in our business as individual people have responsibility to do what we can about this so that is what we are doing." And that was the initial driver. And I happen to believe him. I mean there are all sorts of different drivers: you know, you have got, whether it be shareholders or commercial or protection of brand and so on and so forth, but on the environmental issue there are lots of things that come at it but there is an awful lot as well which is to do with believing that you know you have got an ability to make a change; take a stance and make change. And certainly on the environmental side I absolutely believe in that and we are doing quite a lot in the business in that way.

James's understanding of his own role in shaping and implementing the moral tone of the organization is particularly apparent from his description of the action he has taken against transgressors of the agreed moral code:

I've fired two directors this year. One for, he was the Director of Sales and he was, he went to a sales team meeting and did an overnight. He had too much to drink and was fairly abusive to some of the women on the team. I fired him for it because I said "that is
unacceptable behaviour. That is not how we behave. That is just not the culture of this company. I don’t want you around”. Clearly, and he was terribly apologetic, he recognised that he made an error and I said “no, actually it’s more than an error. You have a different set of values than I have and that we have so bye-bye”. And a similar example just very recently, well at a conference in fact, where one of the directors-to-be decided that the appropriate thing to do was, rather than buy a new suit and rise to the challenge, was to sit up until 6 o’clock in the morning and then sleep through most of the sessions the following day. Inappropriate behaviour. You know that is not the value-set that we want in this business. So whether that’s about dilemmas or decisions but how tough you are in terms of saying “no this is what we believe in and this is what we are going to do”. There are some examples there of saying, “no this is what it’s about and these are the values and yes we will enforce them”.

Clearly, then, James believes that the most significant influence on the moral tone of the organization is the leader. He also speaks of the importance of the “leadership team” – his senior managers – supporting the moral agenda. However, it is clear that he casts himself as the driver. The person at the top, whether it is James in his organization or role models such as Stuart Rose in other organizations, is the person who sets the moral direction. Not only is this the case de facto but he sees no reason why it should be otherwise. Furthermore, James appears to be very comfortable fulfilling the roles of moral authorship and moral enforcement. But where does the legitimacy of the leader’s moral legislation and execution derive from; how can the leader be sure that his or her moral appraisal is accurate? I asked James this question.

*Is there a danger that, if the moral agenda is being set by the person at the top and the way that that moral agenda should be handled is being set by the person at the top, you maybe missing out on some things and some responses to those things which are morally quite important?*

Well yes.

*Can you necessarily assume that the person on the top has that sort of moral perspicuity to be able to see what is important and how we should respond to those things?*

No you can’t. But equally, you know, to throw it out the other way, you can’t assume anything actually. That person could be pretty immoral ... you know this actually affirms the influence of the role. You can have somebody pretty immoral at the top and that would very quickly drive a pretty immoral culture because of the style of that person who would run that through the team. So, for instance, [I’ll] give you a very easy example of that. If it’s
acceptable for the guy at the top to, at a conference, go to bed with one of the girls on the account-management team, then it's acceptable to the leadership team, the guys in the leadership team, to at the end of the night pick them off and be shagging your own staff basically. That has happened here before in this company. Two or three years ago that was the culture. I find that totally, utterly unacceptable. So there you have got to [say]: "no, no" because I think it's wrong; it's an abuse of the position.

So you can see how I sort of, if you like, laid down the culture and style around those issues. Somebody else might come in with a very different agenda. They might be quite an immoral person and before you know it, they might be dishonest in their dealings. They might go to a client and actually look a client in the eye and lie to them; you know, promise them that we can do something that we can't do in order to win the business. You don't do that. Because I don't believe in that and therefore I am trying to create and develop a culture around, if you like, values that I think are important. But it is dangerous because I might miss some things but it's equally dangerous that somebody in my position could have a very adverse effect because I like to think things I am doing are fairly positive but somebody could have an incredibly negative effect if you got the wrong person in the role.

Yes. I suppose you could get somebody in the role who is doing things which you would consider to be immoral and maybe that person doesn't consider them to be immoral.

Well they would consider them to be moral because they think it's their job and I think some of these people do, they consider their role to be a hundred percent unequivocally responsible to the shareholders for delivering maximum profit anyway you can get it. And I don't think it's as simple as that. But that's how some people would view it and therefore you can be, with that agenda, you can be very cutthroat and mercenary and just disrespectful of individuals and people and anything else you roll over on the way. There are plenty of successful businessmen who have got there simply because they just ride rough shod over everything that gets in their way.

Later in the conversation I returned to this issue, asking if the people at the top of the business could be relied upon to have the necessary ethical perspicacity and breadth of moral vision to fulfil the onerous role that James envisages.

So is there a danger then, given the importance of seeing things from the point of view of the other side of the tracks, is there a danger in the moral agendas of the business and the way that we respond to those agendas being driven primarily by senior management who presumably are seeing things mostly from one side of the tracks?
... Yes there is a danger because you know it can be a positive or negative influence on a business. The responsibility, if you like, then comes at every level of the company in terms of the recruitment, to try and recruit leaders and managers and at every level so this does apply all the way down. What we are talking about is where I am sitting in the company but you can equally have a conversation with the [chief finance officer] and look down from there or you could have a conversation with someone who is running our [airport] service centre of one hundred people and they would have the same view because they have got a team and so at every level and every layer these things apply. And I am only a layer because there are three layers above me. At every layer we have got a responsibility to try and recruit people who have sufficient maturity and experience and the right value-fit so they will do the right things ... That's where another responsibility comes in, it's about who do you bring into the company and I like to think, in answer to your question in a way, I like to think I was brought into this job because, through my interviews, people saw that, yes, I can run the numbers and I can look at a spreadsheet and I can do this and that but, actually, I also have broader leadership skills or a set of values and integrity that they felt was also good and therefore good for the business.

So, James acknowledges the danger of investing such moral responsibility in the people at the top but believes that this hazard can be avoided by appointing people of the requisite moral fibre to managerial leadership roles throughout the organization. Assuring the moral probity of the organization thus becomes a task in which the function of management recruitment plays a key role.

It is apparent from James’s responses that he thinks about morality in fairly straightforward terms. He believes that right and wrong are readily apparent, at least to a person with a certain degree of moral perspicacity. The task of the moral leader is therefore to ensure that the organization and its members follow self-evidently, morally-desirable courses of action rather than subordinating morality to other considerations, such as the unbridled pursuit of profit or the personal foibles for which James has dismissed senior managers. A further task of leadership is to appoint to key, subordinate leadership roles people who share the leader’s moral sagacity and integrity. The danger of immoral leadership lies primarily in an immoral person attaining the role of leader; not in a morally well-meaning leader being misguided in his or her moral appraisal. James allows that a morally well-meaning leader may have a mistaken understanding of moral rightness but the possibility that his own moral compass may be off-course does not seem to trouble him overly. His reference to business leaders who “consider their role to be a 100% unequivocally responsible to the shareholders for delivering maximum profit anyway you can get it” suggests that such people are either blind to the clearly apparent wrongness of their actions or that they are
pursuing a morally questionable agenda even though they perceive it to be wrong. The difference between moral leadership and immoral leadership, then, lies in the extent to which the leader is willing to promote a self-evident moral agenda over other considerations and the extent to which that person reinforces that agenda throughout the organization. James' observation that he may "miss some things" in his moral appraisals is not an acknowledgement of fallible moral judgement on his part; it is no more than an admission that he may overlook some minor detail.

To summarize, James presents an understanding of moral leadership that differs notably from that offered by David. Whereas David perceives moral leadership as deeply embedded in values that have sustained the organization over many generations, James accentuates the part played by the leader in shaping those values. While David emphasises the need for the leader to consistently apply a predetermined and well-established moral agenda, James focuses on the leader's role in defining that agenda, a task which may involve changing established behavioural patterns and introducing new priorities. For David, moral leadership is measured in accordance with the template offered by his organization's traditions; for James moral leadership involves shaping organizational behaviour around the leader's unilaterally-defined apprehension of moral probity.

Despite these differences, though, David and James share some common ground. In particular, both consider the apprehension of moral probity to be a straightforward matter. Their meta-ethical stance might be paraphrased as follows: we all know what's right and wrong; it's just that some of us act on our apprehension of moral rightness while others choose to ignore it. Whereas David takes moral reassurance from the ethical sensitisation of his company, James draws it from the ethical sensitisation of the leader. The difference between moral leadership and immoral leadership therefore lies in the leader's commitment to pursuing moral rectitude. If leaders care enough about morality to keep moral considerations uppermost in their decision-making, then they will be moral leaders. Although the morally-sensitive leader may "miss some things", these are likely to be omissions of minor detail rather than a misguided overall agenda. And even these minor oversights can be avoided if organizations adopt appropriate leadership recruitment policies. Since moral right and wrong are easily apprehended, at least by a morally perspicacious leader, the only difficulty such organizations must overcome is to ensure commitment to the moral agenda; the accurate definition of that moral agenda presents few difficulties. If organizations and leaders care enough about morality, they will be moral. Although David tends to focus on the organization while James focuses on the leader, both share the presupposition that moral sensitisation ensures moral probity.
A further common feature of their respective discourses is that neither David nor James envisages the involvement of junior members of the organization in the development of its moral agenda. As far as David is concerned, junior employees have little interest in such matters; they just want that agenda to be consistently applied. From James’s point of view, the people at the top of the organization are the ones who are influential in shaping its behaviour; therefore responsibility for setting its moral tone should reside with them. And although the senior management team are expected to exemplify the organization’s moral code, the key role in its definition lies with the leader. David’s and James’s appraisal of junior players’ capability and willingness to contribute to the organization’s moral direction contrasts sharply with the more inclusive approach that I will outline next.

Roger: the Mediator of Communication

Roger works as CEO of a large, rural county council. He trained as a solicitor before embarking on a career in local government. He has previously worked as CEO in other councils. He has been in his current role for ten years and is due to retire during the year that followed our meeting.

Like David and James, Roger believes that it is important for an organization to have a shared moral code. In response to my opening question about the ethical dimension of leadership, he reflects on the need for a clearly defined set of values and describes some steps that he has taken to enhance clarity within his own organization.

Clearly, here, you are providing leadership for a large number of people. Is the ethical dimension of that something that you give a great a deal of thought to?

I think it is because it comes from, I mean admittedly when you are exercising leadership some of the key values that you hold are an important part of both the style of that leadership and actually also of its content because there are particular sticking points. And it’s interesting … I wasn’t satisfied that the core values [here] were clear enough - we did have a set of core values but they were too long and they were too wordy and therefore people were able to interpret them, so instead of them becoming a set of organizational values they became a set of individual values, still in the right areas but people could place there own interpretation on the bits that they were less comfortable with and I think that can then give confusing messages around leadership - so we’ve only recently actually very much simplified our core values … So we looked quite carefully at some of the subtle distinctions that there are in that set of values.
Although Roger agrees with David and James on the need for a shared code, his understanding of the relationship between morality and organizational leadership also shows marked differences from theirs. The first point of divergence is that Roger presents the apprehension of moral probity as a more nuanced task than is apparent from David and James’s discourses. David, the Company Man reflects on the need for his own values to be in harmony with the company’s moral agenda: “hopefully one reflects the other otherwise you’re a fish out of water in your organization” and also speaks of the importance of consistent application of that code throughout the organization. Meanwhile, James, the Moral Crusader shows a steely determination to impose his own apprehension of moral rectitude on the organization. Both view the definition of moral rectitude as a relatively straightforward matter. For Roger, on the other hand, there is space for ambivalence. He reflects on the possibility of tension between, on the one hand the personal values of organizational members, and even of organizational leaders, and, on the other hand, the moral code of the organization. Nevertheless, there needs to be some shared ground between the values of the individual and those of the organization.

The way we put it in the debate is: we can have different core values in relation to our personal lives. So we are not an exact match for what we might live out personally because we’ll feel stronger about some aspects. But I think when you come to work you sort of put on a hat saying: “What’s the minimum value that will actually make me wonder whether I wanted to put my name to leading this organization”. So I think there are two different - there’s actually a separation between your own personal values, which might be better or worse but will almost certainly be more detailed and some will be significantly different from those that you are required to adopt in an organization.

Roger’s suggestion that “we can have different core values in relation to our personal lives” and that these “will almost certainly be more detailed and some will be significantly different from those that you are required to adopt in an organization” implies a far less straightforward meta-ethical stance than that articulated by either David or James. Roger’s discourse leaves space for conflicting ethical positions, which seems to contradict the presupposition, implicit in David and James’s discourses, that the apprehension of moral probity is a straightforward matter. Roger does not elaborate on precisely why their can be different value commitments, so he could be interpreted as proffering a relativist understanding or he may be suggesting that people might disagree about the nature of objective rightness. But whether he is presenting a relativist or an objectivist understanding, his discourse conflicts with the implication of David’s and James’s accounts that we all
know what is morally right and that moral leaders and moral organizations are therefore those which subordinate other considerations to this self-evident moral agenda.

A second difference between Roger’s stance and those of David and James is that, although he believes that leaders have a key role to play in shaping and upholding organizational values, Roger shows a greater willingness to involve members of the organization, including junior members, in the definition of its moral code. Whereas David describes how the organization’s founding family defines its values and James dwells primarily on his own contribution to the organization’s moral agenda, Roger articulates a more consultative understanding:

... the core values of the organization: where do they actually come from? Do they come from you? Do they come from the top?

We had this debate, and it’s a fascinating debate, you have to allow discussion around them but I also think that it’s a function of leadership, I was going to use the word to “impose” those core values and that’s too strong a word. But it is a function of leadership, at the end of the day, to take a clear view on what the core values of the organization are. But I don’t think you should deny the organization the opportunity to feed into that process ... We had a debate in the corporate management board to start with around some of the thoughts. We then put them out to the outer service group, the senior managers. We then had a series of groups to which people could volunteer to feed in their views. And they were refined as a result of that. And I think they were improved as a result of that, actually. But they are still held and they are still owned in leadership terms. I think that’s absolutely vital. So it’s interesting that we had actually been through that.

Yes ok. So that process of engagement, how deep down into the organization did that go? Did that stay at a fairly senior level?

No. I mean it was - we certainly wanted to take the view of the senior managers in the organization so we ran it through... a tier immediately below Directors. We run with a very small management team of five directors and myself and then we have about another sixteen people who are heading up individual functions. And then we have a tier then of people who are in a management capacity of one form or another and that’s probably around about the ninety mark. So anybody who is managing a team in any shape or form will be included in that senior management. And they participated. We then had a series of focus groups which was sliced through the organization. So we’d have people from the top to the bottom of the organization working as interest groups to feed into that.
Those managers that took part in that process; were they also expected to engage with their respective teams?

Yes. We had quite a bit, quite a bit of effort in the communication strategy around that so that people - there was a website so people could participate individually as well.

So, for Roger, moral leadership has a consultative dimension. He believes that leaders have an important role to play in defining and supporting the organization’s moral agenda: “it is a function of leadership, at the end of the day, to take a clear view on what the core values of the organization are” and the values “are still held and they are still owned in leadership terms”. Nevertheless, he also describes a range of measures that he has put in place to encourage participation in the process of value-definition. Although managers seem to have played the more substantial role in that process, focus groups and the intranet have also enabled contributions from more junior levels. Furthermore, Roger’s suggestion that the outcomes “were improved as a result of that” implies his approbation of this consultative undertaking.

For Roger, then, moral leadership is a more democratic undertaking than is suggested by either David or James. But this presents a potential difficulty: what is the leader to do if the moral agenda that he or she consultatively facilitates conflicts with his or her own apprehension of moral rightness? By relinquishing his grip on the organization’s moral tiller, Roger must confront the possibility that it may steer an ethical course with which he is personally uncomfortable. This tension would be of little concern to either David or James. In David’s case, consistent application of the self-evident standards of probity that are enshrined within his organization’s moral code offers an adequate template for personal conduct. In James’s case, self-assurance of the probity of his own moral commitments legitimises their imposition over and above any alternatives. Such straightforward certitude is not possible for leaders who adopt Roger’s consultative style. Facilitators of intersubjectively agreed moral agendas must face the possibility that the consultative processes that they mediate may reach conclusions with which they radically disagree. Roger’s discourse is interesting for his reflections on how he negotiates such tension. Consider, for example, the following two passages of narrative. Each offers a specific example to illustrate a tactic that Roger adopts when chairing public meetings on behalf of the Council:

You know I do a significant number of public meetings and I can probably illustrate it in two ways because there are two messages that come out. We don’t meet a cross section of
the community, I think it's important I say that, but, I mean, predominantly people will say if only we exterminated young people the whole world would be a better place. Because young people commit crime and young people drink; young people smoke drugs; young people make a lot of noise and drop litter; young people congregate in groups and frighten us. An incredibly powerful message coming from the public at large. Now if I weren't to offer some challenge and some leadership in those circumstances, people will go away from those meetings reinforced in their view that if we got rid of young people the world would be a better place. But I do fairly simple things in leadership terms which I think, again, we come back to what I think is a set of core values that I want to espouse. And I say "look there are the same number of good, bad and indifferent young people as there are of good, bad and indifferent people of any age group; the same good, bad and indifferent policemen as there are people". And those are some of the things I think that you sometimes have to be prepared to do. And you have to do it quite sharply because people won't respond otherwise, they will just fudge it.

And the second example:

Let me try and give you an example; probably pushing the limits in terms of what I ought to be doing in leadership terms as Chief Executive. We've had a very significant influx of Eastern European workers [in the local area], predominantly young, predominantly quite bright young people working in areas that are poorly paid. So they are augmenting our existing work force. They haven't posed a threat locally in terms of jobs because we've got virtually full employment locally. And one of the early challenges, actually championed by [a local celebrity] because he got very involved in this, started a little bit of a hare running about: you know: "lock up your daughters, the Eastern Europeans are coming". And, probably the limit of what I've ever gone to, I did actually say at a public meeting "look we need to wake up to the fact and actually we need to be blunt about it: these young people are coming from societies that are actually far less sexually promiscuous than our own". Now that's a value that I feel very strongly about treating people equally; it's something that I would be very forceful about in my personal life. But I am probably getting quite close to the margins of where I ought to be going in terms of challenging locally. Because I am exhibiting what is a very strong personal value to me, it would be a very strong value to the organization as I said at the outset: it's about equality and that sort of thing. But there is a limit to how far your role permits you to go in there and I think that example, I've been ok, I got away with it, it was taken in the spirit it was intended. But you've got to be careful how far you push that sort of line.

In these simple examples, Roger relates how, as a leader, he is well placed to encourage reflection amongst the group to which he is expected to provide leadership. In these cases, Roger is interfacing with external stakeholders rather than the internal groups that have
been the main focus of attention in my discussion so far. However, this distinction need not preclude the relevance of Roger's facilitative tactics to this discussion. As CEO, these external stakeholders look to him for leadership. The processes that he adopts in providing this leadership may be just as relevant in relation to different leadership contexts. Rather than directly imposing his own convictions on the group, Roger's tactic is to encourage the group to think critically about the implications of their own perspectives and also to reflect upon the presuppositions upon which those perspectives are based. He thus achieves a compromise between on the one hand, leadership as moral autocracy and, on the other hand, laissez faire, relativist tolerance. By encouraging critical reflection, and by offering insights that might broaden the scope of that reflection, he points the group in the direction which he believes is morally apposite without demanding their compliance to his own convictions.

Despite the effectiveness of this tactic in these particular instances, Neal must still come to terms with the possibility of rupture between his own perspectives and those of the group. No matter what lengths he goes to in order to encourage a consultative outcome that is consistent with his own moral commitments, the outcome of intersubjective facilitation may conflict with the views of the facilitator. In such instances, Roger indicates a readiness to temper aspects of his personal views in order to bring them in line with those of the organization. In the following discourse, he speaks of the onus that rests upon leaders to observe fealty to democratically defined, organizational agendas, even where these may conflict in small ways with their own moral sensitivities.

So I think it does get more complex and I think some of my personal values are probably still simpler and stronger than the values that I bring to the organization ... [which] are more subject to the compromise of everyday practical experience than some of the personal values that I would hold very, very strongly in my personal life, when I feel much freer to deal with it. I deal with the consequences in your personal life in a different way. You are not carrying responsibility for an organization. You know you can, I think if anything, you can be freer in terms of the values that you would espouse as an individual than you can be with those you would espouse on behalf of an organization. I don't think it's going to be huge, I think it would be worrying psychologically if there was a huge mismatch between the two.

Yes, is it a difference in values or is it similar values applied in different contexts with slightly different outcomes?
I'm not going to allow it to be as easy as that. I think what you are saying is partly right. The challenge back, I think if the fundamental values were to be different again I think you would be worried. I think it's about, you know, feeling free to be more extreme sometimes in the way that you express them, in the way that you would apply them if you are exercising personal freedom. You know you might take some more radical action against elements of society that you are more uncomfortable with in a personal capacity than you know you can afford to take in a political environment and leading an organization that is democratically elected and which is trying to combine different views.

So, for Roger, there is something about taking on a leadership role in a democratically constituted organization that entails a responsibility to observe the outcomes of its consultative processes, even where these may conflict with his own moral commitments. I will take a moment to draw out the implications of this stance by contrasting it to some alternative perspectives. It contrasts most starkly with the understanding articulated by James: for James, since the imposition of the leader’s own, self-evidently right, moral agenda is a function of leadership, such conflicts are unlikely to occur. It also contrasts with Davids understanding. On the one hand, David, like Roger, speaks of the need for the leader to support the values of the organization. However, whereas for David those values are given to the organization by its founding family, for Roger they are created by the organization through ongoing consultative processes. As such they are continually subject to revision and evolution. Consequently, whereas David has been able to assess the fit between Rutherford’s moral agenda and his own, safe in the knowledge that the former is unlikely to take an unexpected turn, such security is denied to a leader in a more democratically constituted setting.

There are limits, though, to the extent that Roger would be prepared to compromise his own moral convictions to consultatively defined values. Roger had mentioned earlier that working within certain types of political context would challenge his moral sensitivities. He mentioned, in particular, that he would find it hard to lead a council which had a British National Party majority. I drew on this scenario to present him with a specific dilemma:

*Now, just take a hypothetical situation: supposing you were to go in to a context where the British National Party was the dominant ethos, do you think it would be a legitimate thing for you to try and change that?*

That’s a very difficult question because it’s, you know if you are a democrat you believe in democracy. I think the way I’d answer it, which is a bit of a cop out, is that I think that the decision that you have to make as a leader is: are you prepared to go in and fight against that
democratic process? Because that is effectively what you are doing. And you know there are plenty of leaders over time, people like Martin Luther King a prime example, who actually exercised that choice: to go in to those situations and to offer leadership that’s out of kilter with a large part of the community that they are seeking to influence. And that’s a legitimate exercise of leadership. Whether it’s a legitimate, I think this is an important distinction between someone like Martin Luther King who, although he sought direct election and achieved some legitimacy through being directly elected in some places, ... wasn’t in a position that I was in where he’s been coming in as an appointed officer to service a directly elected body. And I think there’s an important distinction there. For me, I’m not saying this makes it right; my line would probably be to say that I shouldn’t accept an appointment in those circumstances because it is not my role as an appointed officer to challenge the democratically elected organization.

Roger’s response, then, is that where the rift between the democratically elected stance of an organization and his own values is too great, he would decline appointment to a leadership role with that organization. This response leaves unanswered the question: what would he do if the consultative outcomes that he facilitates once in post are significantly out of kilter with his own values?

One final question that I explored with Roger is whether his commitment to facilitating consultation conflicts with what is expected of him as a “leader”. Are the stakeholders in his organization happy for him to consult around issues or is there a general expectation of him, as the leader, to “lead”; that is, to impose his own convictions on the organization.

*Does the fact that you are formally expected to provide leadership; does it reduce the amount that you can be a mediator as opposed to an imposer of values?*

No I don’t think it does. I mean it’s a question you would have to put to other people in a sense, because I think there is always a danger in trying to answer that one yourself. I think, you know, I’ve been here now for ten years and people will understand that in the way that I exercise leadership: that I am anxious to engage with other people; that I am not going to close the door to those ideas; that those ideas genuinely and importantly influence my outlook on running the organization. And I think it is wrong to see that as negating leadership. I mean actually what you are doing is you are enhancing your ability to lead by listening and creating a climate in which people aren’t afraid to contribute their views.

Roger’s suggestion that “it’s a question that you would need to put to other people” perhaps indicates an ontology of intersubjective constructivism that extends beyond his understanding of moral leadership. Most importantly, though, for the present discussion, his
response indicates that, in his view, a commitment to consultation need not undermine the effectiveness of leadership; indeed, it can enhance that effectiveness.

To summarise, Roger articulates a more consultative and a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between morality and leadership than is apparent from either David or James's discourses. Whereas these two locate authorship of the organization's moral agenda either in its traditional values or in the judgement of the leader, Roger seeks to involve other stakeholders in that process of value definition. The desirability of such consultative processes is partly dependent upon the complex and diverse nature of moral judgement. Whereas David and James imply that moral evaluation is a fairly straightforward matter, Roger's discourse suggests that different people might legitimately hold different moral views to his own.

Roger's discourse in particularly interesting for its account of how he negotiates the tensions immanent to such an understanding. The most apparent tension is that between his desire to be true to his own moral convictions and his perceived responsibility to show fealty to the consultatively agreed moral agenda that he has facilitated. His resolution to this tension lies primarily in his understanding of his role as being a facilitator not just of consultation but also of critical reflection on the part of organizational members. As well as mediating consultative processes, he considers it part of his leadership responsibility to encourage people to reflect on their convictions.

If the outcomes of such facilitated, reflexive processes differ markedly from their personal moral convictions, leaders face a choice: to overrule those outcomes and impose their own heartfelt convictions; to respect the democratic process and support its outcomes; or to walk away from the organization. Roger's discourse suggests that he would eschew the first of these three options; he would generally favour the second option; however, where the chasm between personal and organizational values is too wide he would need to think carefully about his continued tenure with that organization.

Comparison of the Perspectives Articulated by David, James and Roger

The three participants that I have discussed so far are illustrative of three very different ways of thinking about organizational leadership and morality: David understands the moral dimension of his role as being deeply embedded in the established value system of the organization; James emphasises his role as a leader in shaping that value system; Roger dwells on the desirability of involving others in the value-shaping process. As such, I have
drawn on my discussion with each to exemplify what might be referred to as three ideal types: the “Company Man”, the “Moral Crusader” and the “Mediator of Communication”. As with any ideal types, these are unlikely to be realised in actuality in their pure form. Thus, David, James and Roger, whilst not embodying these ideal types in every detail, at least offer enough of an approximation to facilitate exploration of some of the implications and repercussions of each perspective.

At this stage, I should mention the possibility of context dependency in relation to these respective ideal types. It is highly likely that the ways in which David, James and Roger think and speak about the morality of leadership are, at least partly, shaped by their respective organizational contexts. David, the Company Man, has spent a number of years working with a very well-established, privately-owned organization. The organization was started over a hundred-and-thirty years ago by its eponymous founding family, members of which are still involved in its governance. Furthermore, increasing public concern about animal welfare and land usage in recent years may have encouraged the corporate centre to pay close attention to its ethical profile. James, the Moral Crusader, has recently taken over as the leader of a national division of a publiclyquoted corporation that trades within a fast-moving industry context. The company claims a long history but its roots are complicated by frequent mergers, demergers and acquisitions. The leader who James has replaced had, according to James, permitted morally lax practices in the organization, particularly amongst its senior managers. Roger, the Mediator of Communication, leads a public-sector organization that has an explicitly democratic mandate.

That David, James and Roger understand the moral responsibilities of their respective leadership role as they do is therefore unsurprising. David’s traditionally shaped governance context might partly explain his reverence for the organization and its established values. Furthermore, growing public scrutiny of its ethical credentials in recent years may have encouraged David’s company to develop, and demand fealty to, a unified corporate response. In contrast, the dynamic context that James has recently joined and the moral torpor of his predecessor may account for James’s eagerness to exercise moral authorship. Meanwhile the democratic organizational environment to which Roger is accustomed, along with the need to answer to empowered external stakeholders, may have ingrained his consultative disposition. Furthermore, the language used by each may also be expressive of contrasting organizational contexts. It is possible that the way in which each represents what he does and how he thinks serves to accentuate the contrasts between the three: maybe David, James and Roger are not so different as their discourses suggests; it’s
just that the nature of those discourses is itself shaped by the expectations of their respective contexts.

The question whether organizational context shapes participants' understanding of moral leadership, and/or the language used to express that understanding, is an important one. However, a further question, which is perhaps of even greater interest, is this: are these different approaches uniquely suited to their respective contexts or are there aspects of each that have cross-contextual relevance and which may thus enhance the moral sustainability of leadership in different situations? This is a question to which I will return in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Certain parallels are apparent between these three ideal type discourses and the three meta-ethical stances that I reviewed earlier, although it would be misleading to overstate the extent to which the views expressed by these participants fit neatly into meta-ethical boxes. The emphasis which David places on consistent application of pre-established moral standards is redolent of a commitment to principle-based morality. Furthermore, his tacit assumption of self-evident moral rightness is resonant of the objective moral ontology that underpins principle-based theory. However, apart from his evocation of a utilitarian-style rationale to justify redundancies (a point to which I will return later in more detail), David does not tend to draw explicitly on principle-based rationales in order to explain his moral commitments. Indeed, his commitment to the established values of the organizational community is evocative of more conservatively-inclined (rather than an intersubjectively-inclined) versions of virtue ethics rather than a principle-based understanding.

James's confidence in his own moral judgement and his willingness to implement his own moral choices are indicative of the authenticity enjoined by existentialist theorists: his readiness to assume the role of moral author on behalf of the organization is notably devoid of the anguish which existentialist theorists suggest may attend apprehension, on the part of the inauthentic, of their moral autonomy. On the other hand, aspects of James's moral understanding are inconsistent with existentialism. He, like David, draws upon a utilitarian-style moral rationale for making people redundant (see below), he articulates elsewhere a deontological commitment to his shareholders and he also places a virtue-style emphasis on conformity to shared values. A particular departure between James's discourse and existentialist meta-theory is his apparent assumption that the values that he upholds can claim some sort of self-evident moral probity; a seemingly objectivist understanding that is at odds with existentialism. James's insistence that others share his moral agenda also contrasts with the relativist tolerance that permeates some strands of existentialist thought.
Of the three, Roger's approximation to the intersubjective meta-ethic seems to offer the closest match to a meta-ethical type. Throughout my conversation with Roger, I was struck by the extent to which he articulated a consultative understanding of his leadership responsibilities. Nevertheless, even Roger departs from the intersubjective ideal in his occasional references to seemingly universal standards of moral rightness.

Therefore, although the moral understanding of each of these three is largely congruent with a particular meta-ethical perspective, each also departs in significant respects from the perspective to which it approximates. These departures from meta-ethical purity are hardly surprising. None of the participants report having read moral philosophy so they are unlikely to exhibit consistent fealty to any particular ethical theory or meta-ethical perspective. Furthermore, these departures need not invalidate the insights gained by drawing comparisons with these respective meta-ethical perspectives. The views articulated by the research participants, insofar as there are characteristic of these different meta-ethical perspectives, and despite their points of divergence from them, offer an empirical dimension that may facilitate reflection on the implications of these perspectives for leadership morality. I will explore these implications in my concluding chapter.

Before doing so, I will continue my discussion of empirical research. This ongoing discussion will comprise two stages. The next chapter will explore the extent to which other research participants echo the understandings articulated by David, James and Roger. By broadening empirical elaboration of these three perspectives in this way, I hope to enhance the insights afforded so far and to thus offer a richer basis for subsequent consideration in my concluding section. A further stage, which will comprise the subject matter of the third and last chapter of my empirical report, is to discuss the responses offered by participants to the two areas of moral disquiet with leadership that were examined during my earlier review of the leadership literature.
5.2 THREE META-ETHICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CORRESPONDING TENSIONS

So far in this empirical report I have identified three different ways of thinking about leadership morality, or three ideal types, each of which is articulated by one particular research participant. I have described these perspectives as those of the Company Man, the Moral Crusader and the Mediator of Communication. I went on to reflect on the possibility that these different approaches, or at least the language used to express them, might be shaped by the respective organizational contexts within which the three participants find themselves. I also suggested that, notwithstanding any contextual dependency, the perspectives articulated by these three may have cross-contextual relevance; that is, each may have something important to say to contexts other than that in which the research participant who articulates it currently operates. I have also pointed to the congruence between these different articulations and the different meta-ethical perspectives discussed earlier. David, the Company Man, understands his leadership agenda as being embedded in the values of the organization and places a great deal of emphasis on consistent application of those values, which corresponds in some respects to a principle-based understanding. James, the Moral Crusader, eagerly embraces moral authorship, which has overtones of existentialist authenticity. Roger, the Mediator of Communication, is keen to encourage consultative participation, which is redolent of intersubjectivist ethics.

In this chapter I will explore in greater detail one particular characteristic manifested by each of these three participants, drawing on discussions with other research participants to facilitate this further exploration. In David’s case, I have chosen the importance that he places on consistent application of principles. In James’s case, I will explore in greater depth the issue of moral authenticity on the part of leaders. In Roger’s case, I will give further consideration to his approbation of intersubjective facilitation.

I have chosen these particular characteristics for two reasons. The first reason is that each is relevant to the practical application of a specific meta-ethical perspective to the realm of organizational leadership. In my earlier discussions of meta-ethical perspectives, I indicated the significance of consistency to principle-based leadership; the importance of authenticity for existentialist leadership; and the importance to intersubjectively ethical leadership of facilitating communication.

The second reason for choosing these particular characteristics is that each is likely to throw up certain tensions in its practical application within leadership contexts. As far as
consistency is concerned, tension may occur between the perceived responsibility to treat people consistently and feelings of partiality towards certain people, particularly those to whom one is closest. In relation to moral authenticity, there may be tension between the desire to act authentically and pressures to conform to the imperatives of a particular establishment or community. In the case of intersubjective facilitation, tension may arise between the desire to facilitate communication between a plurality of perspectives and the desire to seek moral succour within a supportive and homogenous community. I will therefore explore the extent to which research discussions manifest these tensions and also the varied responses that different participants adopt to them.

Remaining Thirteen Research Participants

I have already provided some background information about the three participants discussed in the last section. Before continuing, I will introduce the other thirteen people who have taken part in my research discussions and upon whose narratives I will draw in this and the next chapter. This introduction will comprise a brief overview of the backgrounds and current roles of each of these thirteen.

Ray has worked mainly in retailing. He has been operations director with some of the UK’s biggest retail businesses and is currently CEO of a nationwide, out-of-town, retail chain.

Alison worked as a business planner in manufacturing and fashion retailing before becoming regional CEO for Business Link and the Chamber of Commerce. She serves as a director of several other organizations and is also governor of a large academic institution.

Stan worked as a manager in local authority care before becoming CEO of a private provider of care services. His organization has consistently been very highly rated as an employer of choice in media surveys.

Jane, a former finalist for Business Woman of the Year, is MD of a family-owned drinks company. She is also chair of a national industry body for her sector.

Mark was MD for a pub company before joining a major retailing group where he became MD of two nationwide high-street retail businesses. He has also been CEO for a medical services company and, when I met him, he was researching management buy-in opportunities.
Patrick's background is in the hospitality industry. He spent nearly twenty years in different MD roles for a large pub owning and brewing company before taking up the position of CEO for one of the UK's biggest sports organizations. He took semi-retirement several years ago but retains board involvement in several professional sport organizations.

Max worked as a senior manager in hospitality and retailing before becoming CEO of a music company in the US. He is currently CEO of a market leading UK travel company.

George worked as HR director for a range of private and public organizations. He retired several years ago and now runs a small tourism business.

Gill worked as a senior HR manager in travel and retailing before becoming HR director for a large electrical goods company. She recently left this role and is now running her own business as a personal trainer and masseuse.

Nigel has spent most of his career in financial services and is currently CEO of a large mutual building society. He is also regional chairman of the CBI.

Robert has spent most of his career as a senior manager in various national sports organizations. He is currently MD of one of the country's largest sports venues.

Dennis spent several years as main board director with one of Europe's leading financial services companies. He left this post to work as a management change consultant. When I met him he was working as part of a loosely-affiliated partnership that offers consultancy services at senior management and board level.

Sarah worked in finance for several travel companies before becoming FD of an executive travel business. She is now FD with a large charitable organization.

Tension between Consistency and Partiality

In my earlier discussion of principle based ethics, I drew attention to the breadth and diversity of principle-based theories and to the expedient flexibility that this offers to those who seek an ethical justification for a chosen course of action. The consequence of this expedient flexibility is that, whatever organizational leaders may wish to do, they can probably find a suitable principle-based moral rationale if they look hard enough and apply it with a sufficient imagination. I pointed out that, to avoid the charge of expedient
rationalisation, leaders who aspire to principle-based legitimacy ought to at least show consistent fealty to a particular theory and apply it in a consistent manner. Otherwise, ethical justification becomes a meaningless exercise.

I have already elaborated on the emphasis that David, the Company Man, places on consistent application of values. David is not alone in his veneration of consistency. For example, Max reflects on the need to ensure that the values to which an organization commits itself are consistently applied rather than just talked about:

*Do you think objectivity is always a prerequisite when confronting some moral, morally charged situation?*

No. Consistency is ... there are things [in this organization] that are out of line here with some of the values that people have. And what I wanted to do was do something about that and make them a value, rather than something that people just talk about and would like to have. You know, it’s, to me, a huge part of running a business successfully because it’s nearly always where that value is sort of lived-up-to but not completely that annoys people, irritates people about working there. They don’t always put their finger on it as such. But it sort of, it’s something that annoys, the lack of consistency or “how can I really believe this if we don’t do this?” So actually that makes it a hollow value, if you like, which is almost insulting.

For Max, then, consistent application of principle is more important than empty rhetoric. However, a number of participants, while speaking of the importance of acting in a dispassionate and consistent manner, reflect on the challenge that this may present to sentiments of affiliation and loyalty. For some, consistency should come first and this presents few moral scruples. Ray, reflecting on his experiences in retailing, describes how the consistent application of a principle leaves no moral space for personal affiliation. He recounts his disapproval at being forced by a former chairman to take longstanding loyalties into account in awarding supply contracts. For Ray, contracts should be awarded on the basis of a “fair tender process”, which precludes partiality:

I’d decided that one of the suppliers, who had a hundred percent exclusive contract, was doing a very bad job, and I decided that I needed to find some new suppliers and I went through a tender process and out of that tender process the supplier who had hundred percent exclusivity didn’t actually end up getting any part of the new contract. And I got a phone call from the chairman of the business and I was told: “you’ve got to give them some
of the business". And I remember feeling at the time, you know, that’s wrong. A fair tender process, they didn’t succeed in the process, they’re out. …

*What was the basis for giving them the business then? Is their an implication of a back­hander going on?*

I don’t know. I think it was probably more of the fact that they’d had a hundred percent of the business and they were going to go to nil percent, and that they’d been, in the early days of this business, they’d been very supportive of the business and the Chairman, I think, felt he owed them some ongoing loyalty. I don’t think there was any back-handers; but I think there was some favouritism.

Mark, whose background is in the pub trade and retailing, also reflects on the need to consistently uphold principles. In this instance, though, Mark has to overcome feelings of sympathy for the recipients of his severity: he describes this scenario as the greatest dilemma that he had faced as a leader. It involves his decision to dismiss some long standing employees for malpractice even though what they had been doing was, so they claimed, accepted custom. Furthermore, so determined was Mark to apply principles that he resisted, during the ensuing tribunal, overtures on behalf of the claimants to settle out of court, a settlement that seemed at the time to be in the best interests of his company:

There was a time in one of my businesses that I was running where I had to dismiss an entire department, I felt – now I’m saying I had to but I believed on consideration that that was the only route - and that involved five individuals with between them something like 110 years service. They were stock takers and they were accepting what could be construed as bribes. Now “it was custom and practice”, they said in their defence: “it’s always happened therefore you know its [acceptable]”. I had just come in to the job and the fact that it always happened, from my point of view, is irrelevant. And it clearly wasn’t possible for them in their position to do this sort of thing. Cutting a long story short, in those days we went to an industrial tribunal and it lasted for weeks and weeks … but at the end of the day they came to us at the eleventh hour and said “would you do a deal”. So you know “we’re willing to settle out of court because we think you’re going to lose” – usual stuff. And of course the brewery by this stage were paranoid because, in those days, tribunals were, you know, get-thee-behind-me-Satan sort of stuff, and really they were seen as being always biased towards the employee. … And they said “we’ll do a deal” and I said “well no I don’t – how can we do a deal on something this basic”. Anyway the brewery said “well why don’t we talk to them”. …I was lucky because I had a mentor at [the company] at the time who was the chairman … who said: “that’s your stance; you’re responsible: you get on with it; if you want to talk about it come back and we’ll talk about it”, [whereas] my
immediate line boss thought we should settle because he was of that mind. Anyway, I said "you can’t do that in a business because everyone then loses confidence in your judgement and your ability and frankly you’re undermining everything we’re trying to do" so I said "I just won’t do it". So, anyway, we stood by our guns and of course we won ...

So it was a matter of the principle; that was the reason you didn’t want to settle?

Yes but it’s about fairness. If you’ve got a set of rules you can always say well it doesn’t say I can’t do this in the rules therefore it’s alright. If you’ve got a sense of principles and a real balanced view of what fairness is you’ll probably win in the end, in fact invariably you’ll win in the end even if it looks pretty dire when you’re staring it in the face.

So, when confronted with a moral dilemma Mark sticks to his principles, even when this may seem overly harsh, even when his boss advises otherwise and even when his principled stance seems, at the time, to be pragmatically risky.

A more emotional account of the consistent application of principles is offered by Sarah. Reflecting on her experience as FD of a travel company, Sarah describes a redundancy scenario, which she felt morally compelled to implement for the greater good of the organization. In order to apply this principle consistently, Sarah has to overcome feelings of affiliation to, and personal responsibility for, members of her own work team:

I guess that was a personally difficult decision because I had a personal affection for, an attachment to, the team of people, the individuals, but I had to step back from that.... There is an element of: “try and detach myself, think of myself in my professional capacity and think I’m doing this because the organization needs it” ... If I do become too embroiled in the emotional side of some of the decisions then I’m not sure I’d ever make them, but you have to step back a bit ... just step back and say: “I know this to be right for the organization, therefore this is what I feel has to be done”.

For Mark, Ray and Sarah, then, feelings of partiality have to be put aside when implementing principles in a fair and consistent manner. In each of these cases, then, the narrator describes overcoming various degrees of compunction about the impact of his or her actions on people to whom he or she was relatively close in order to apply principles that he or she held dear. Ultimately, each regards it as his or her moral duty to overcome feelings of personal affiliation in order to apply principles in a consistent and impartial manner.
This veneration of consistency in the face of countermanding emotions was a pretty general feature of my research discussions. It emerged most strongly in discussions of redundancy scenarios, which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter. Participants spoke frequently of the need to suppress sympathies for those who were losing their jobs. Sentiments of partiality and sympathy for the unfortunate victims of corporate downsizing were most frequently subsumed by fealty to a rule utilitarian-type imperative of organizational maximisation. As with the discussions reviewed in this section, participants saw no place in the leader’s moral toolkit for emotions such as partiality, sympathy and loyalty.

**Tension between Authenticity and Conformity**

In describing the discourse of James, the Moral Crusader, I noted that it is characterised by confidence in his own moral agenda and a readiness to shape the moral tone of the organization. I observed that the ease with which James assumes moral authorship is consistent with existentialist notions of authenticity. James suggests that this moral self-assurance is a necessary ingredient of moral leadership: he believes that the person at the top can and should set the organization’s moral agenda.

James is not alone in stressing the link between ethical leadership and moral authorship. An equally emphatic statement of the role of the leader in establishing organizational values is offered by Ray:

I’m a great believer that a business should be very clear about what its values are ... those values should be the values of the Chief Executive or certainly the leaders of the business. I don’t believe that values can come up through a business. They have to come from the top....

*You don’t feel there’s a place for involving subordinates in the evolution of those values at all?*

No. No. Because if at the end of the day if the values aren’t lived by the leadership of the business then they can’t survive. ... So if they don’t see the leadership of the business living the values, they won’t live the values.

*Is it not feasible for the values that the leadership of the business lives to be developed in consultation with subordinates?*
Oh, it can be developed but the way I would put it is that the leadership needs to be really clear these are our values.... How that is then communicated and the behaviours that are encouraged to reflect the values, that needs to be worked out. If the leader says: “these are the four or five things that are really important”, you then have to involve the rest of the business and say: “well how do these four things manifest themselves in what I do as a job, whether I’m a check-out girl or I’m a buyer or I’m in the supply chain somewhere; what does that mean to me?” And then that needs to be, sort of: “well I think that means this, is that what you meant?” So there’s an iterative process to actually turn the values into behaviours and into the language that the average person in the business can understand because the leaders may say: “well these are my values”, but they may be in a language that the vast majority of the people can’t relate to what he’s on about, so there’s a translation.

Ray’s observation that “if the values aren’t lived by the leadership of the business then they can’t survive” is interesting. His rationale is that the sustenance of organizational values depends upon their observation by leaders: if leaders do not conform to those values, then junior employees can hardly be expected to do so. And since leaders are only likely to observe values for which they can claim personal authorship, it follows that the values of the organization must be those of the leader. This offers a strikingly autocratic understanding of moral authorship, one which limits input from junior members of the organization to discussion about how they are to put those leader-defined values into practice.

In order to adopt the role of moral authorship with such alacrity, leaders need to be very comfortable with their own moral judgement. There is no space for the existential anguish that Sartre sees as a probable response to the realisation of one’s moral autonomy. James is illustrative of existentialist authenticity in more ways than one. He does not conceptualise his moral sensitivities in terms of theoretical principles; he does what his moral intuition tells him is right. He does not shirk tough decisions. He is comfortable imposing his own version of moral probity, even when this involves hardship for others. While he may regret the harsh consequences of his decisions and even try to ameliorate those consequences for the unfortunate recipients of his moral fortitude, he shows few signs of remorse for his decisions.

I also found a note of authenticity running through much of Patrick’s discourse. Despite some apparent contradictions in his conceptualisation of his moral sensitivities, Patrick’s readiness to accept ownership for his moral decision-making, along with his retrospective ease with the decisions that he had taken, were evident. Like James, when reflecting on moral dilemmas, Patrick did not try to hedge responsibility for the hardship that his moral
resoluteness may have caused. He did not try to absolve himself of responsibility for unpleasant decisions; he made no reference to his hands being tied by circumstances or by influential stakeholders. He presented his decisions as his and his alone. One particular story is illustrative of this. Patrick worked for a large brewing and pub owning company and, at one point during his twenty years in various MD roles with that business, he was sent to take over one of its subsidiaries. His brief was to make radical changes in order to improve the commercial performance of that subsidiary; changes that were to include job cuts. Patrick described a dilemma that he encountered when trimming the workforce. The dilemma was whether or not to tell his new employees of their impending redundancy. Patrick has no qualms about claiming personal ownership for the decision that he took in that situation. Twelve years later, he remains comfortable with his actions.

I suppose the biggest dilemma was always with how honest are you with your business plan when the business plan involves restructuring and when the business plan involves trying to cut costs out of the business and that’s the only dilemma I’ve ever really had: the difficulty of should you tell people everything or should you, because to some extent, I mean there are business plans that you come up with where I suppose we felt that you had to keep a bit back so that people wouldn’t fear the worse of those six months of uncertainty ....

... can you think of any particular instances there; can you give me any tangible examples?

Well I knew when I went up to [the pub company in question] that I was going to get rid of the whole board and I was going to make, of the office staff, maybe forty percent redundant. That’s not what I told them and what I did say was I got up there and immediately told them that they had been unsuccessful for three or four years and that there would be changes but I wouldn’t have gone up and told them that I was going to change everything which I felt was necessary. I didn’t do that.

And what were the principles at play there; why did you choose to take that course of action?

I think its because the one thing you don’t want is people to be panicking that they’re going to lose their jobs any earlier than it needs to happen because you lose the momentum and you lose focus ... I always felt that four or five months loss of focus would cost you and you wouldn’t get it back ...

But you’d already made the decision that you were going to take that action but you were just shielding the people from it?
Yes, yes. ...  

And was that something that caused you any discomfort; did you have to think about that whether that was the right move?

I would always mull it over or maybe agonise about the people, not the structure because that never worried me. But going up to [that company] I'd known them all very well and, you know, as I say, I was [one of the people who were subsequently made redundant's] best man and everything, but I mull it over for two or three weeks and then I do the decision very quickly: I have people in; I tell them that's it and to go and then when they've thought about it come back and see me any time but exit interviews for me never took more than five minutes. Having worried and agonised over it I would not have a discussion on it, ever. If people ask me why I say: “that's the decision I've made” ... I'd always agonise over it and worry about it but then do it very quick.

And that decision to go in to [the pub company] and not to inform them that you were going to be making some fairly drastic changes five months down the road, was that a decision which you were at liberty to take or were you influenced in taking that decision?

... I simply discussed it with my then boss at the time and it was a done deal, carte blanche ...  

Whether or not to make those redundancies, and whether or not to share the fact that you were going to make those redundancies with the people, that was all decisions you were at liberty to take?

Absolutely, completely my choice, absolutely...

So this was twelve years ago. Were you in that same position now, would you make exactly the same decision?

I think I would, yes.

Would you go about things differently?

I don’t think I would. No, funny enough, I don’t think I would.

In relating this tale, and more generally in our discussion, Patrick adopts a somewhat different tone from James. Despite his moral self-assurance, Patrick does not present moral choice as a straightforward matter. Whereas James tends to describe ethical decisions as
pretty clear cut, Patrick offers a more nuanced understanding. He struck me as a reflective individual who had thought deeply about the ethical dilemmas that he had encountered. Nevertheless, despite acknowledging their dilemmatic quality, Patrick was unlikely to lose sleep over his decisions once he had made them. Whereas James tends to fire his ethical six-shooter from the hip, Patrick carefully evaluates his target. Nevertheless, once the target has been selected, Patrick is equally ruthless in his aim and just as unlikely to show contrition for any casualties.

In contrast to Patrick’s account, Max offered a very different story. In Max’s case, he describes how, in response to pressure from his boss, he made what he considers to be the wrong decision; he did what was expected of him rather than what he believed to be right. As such, Max’s account might be interpreted as a retrospective acknowledgement of earlier inauthenticity. The background to Max’s story revolves around his promotion from London-based MD of the European division of an American music business to the role of CEO, based in its New York head office. Once in place as CEO, he was called upon to close down some parts of the business that seemed to be underperforming. This included closing down a record label in London that he had helped to set up. This, he believes, was the wrong thing to do. But he took this action, even though it was against his better judgement, because it was expected of him by his Chairman.

I clearly remember putting a lot of emotion and energy into setting up a [record] label in London in the, sort of, early nineties, with a guy who was, you know, quite a close friend. And I felt a huge amount of pressure [later when I became CEO], because it wasn’t working, to make it work. I felt I was put under unfair pressure by [the chairman and owner of the business], who was my boss, because ... in the meantime I’d moved from London to [head office in] New York and had had to close down a lot of things that weren’t working there. And I believe that [the chairman] then sort of looked at this ineptness that I was behind and put a huge amount of pressure on me to close [the London label] ... A huge amount of pressure on me, which you know, clearly it’s my job to absorb and to think about objectively. I think I had rushed closing it because of that. And I had a big impact on the office in London who’d put a huge amount of resources, not just money but a lot of time and effort. And they were very, very committed to the product.

That I think, you know, there was a huge clash of your loyalties and your judgements and actually I think that I didn’t do the right thing; I made a mistake....I wanted to be seen to be fair and equitable. And I think when you’re closing things down you have to be objective, right. So when I was going to [the position of CEO at the] New York [head office], clearly the reason why I went over there was that the [parent] company wasn’t doing so well. And
we looked at what was making money and what wasn’t making money; what was taking people’s time; what was making some progress. ... So we went through that exercise and made a judgement on a lot of the divisions or joint ventures or projects, because they are creatively driven, you just have to use your judgement because they don’t always show the same signs as other products. So I felt that because I had more emotional attachment and maybe to an extent obligation to what I had set up, I didn’t want to feel it was compromising people’s view of my objectivity, right. So I wasn’t strong enough to say: “it wasn’t”. It clearly wasn’t, I was absolutely fine.

So because you’d set up the London business you didn’t want anybody to feel that you were showing any favour towards it?

Yes, absolutely. I was shutting down these things and it could look that I was shutting down things that I hadn’t, that hadn’t got my stamp on it. And that wasn’t the case but I felt it looked that way. And therefore in the interests of being fair and equitable I was unfair to the guys who had – I was over hard on them. I guess it’s bit like, you know, the bit about you can be tougher on the people that are closest to you in many ways. And that was something that – it was a huge dilemma for me at the time.

In his eagerness to do what other people perceived as “being fair and equitable” Max therefore acted in a manner that was unfair according to his own moral judgement. His acknowledgement that “I didn’t want to feel it was compromising people’s view of my objectivity, right. So I wasn’t strong enough to say: ‘it wasn’t’. ” could be interpreted as an expression of Heideggerian anxiety at his own inauthentic behaviour.

Of course, moral authenticity might turn out to be a tough road for those who are embroiled in establishment expectations that are discrepant from their own moral sensitivities. Acting in accordance with ones own moral judgement might not always be the best career move. James and Patrick seem to have been able to pursue their own moral agendas without detriment to their personal circumstances. However, authentically moral leadership may not always be so simple and it is easy to sympathise with Max’s decision to place his Chairman’s apprehension of fairness before his own. Indeed, organizational leaders who aspire to moral authenticity might have to face up to some significant career sacrifices.

In this respect, the narratives of several research participants are interesting. These are people who had occupied leadership roles in corporate environments but who had made career choices on moral grounds. George is most emphatic about his reasons for career change. After spending ten years in HR directorships with various companies, George
encountered a takeover scenario which presented him with a new career opportunity. However, he was unhappy with the HRM ethics of his potential new employer so turned down a financially attractive board role to eventually take up employment in the public sector.

The first question is to decide whether you want to be a part of what it is that you’re serving ... For instance, [a large multi-national] took over [my company], then merged with [another company]. [This other company] were given the sort of whipping hand in the integration. The process they followed was to get two directors together - so marketing, finance, HR - and give them a set of objectives in terms of how the business was to be re-shaped and save huge amounts of money at the same time. And a short time scale to agree to it all. And then report back to the European head office. So the pressure was incredible, because everybody realised that only one of them would have a job at the end of it. Well, my response to that was to say, well, thank you it’s not for me. So they actually offered me the Vice Presidency of Europe for HR and I told them to shove it up their arse. And I took some pleasure in doing that. Because it wasn’t an environment I wanted to be a part of.

Dennis is more circumspect than George in describing his move from an executive seat on the main board of one of the Europe’s largest financial services providers to self-employment as a change consultant. He diplomatically deflected my attempts to get to the bottom of his perceptions on corporate ethics in a large plc. Nevertheless, it is apparent that a key reason for switching to self-employment is that it affords him greater flexibility of choice about the value systems alongside which he works. He was particularly critical of the investment banking industry and explained why he avoided taking clients from that sector:

With reference to [your current consultancy business], you mention that you especially enjoy working with people who want to make a difference. How do you understand “making a difference”?

Well, people who want to feel they’ve left things in a better shape, in a better place, than when they started.

“In a better shape, in a better place” in what respect?

Well, not purely in commercial terms, if that’s behind your question, with some of these other sets in mind, so it’s more robust, more sustainable environment than previously.
And do you find that your clients are generally open to that perspective, or do they tend to view things in more instrumental terms?

By and large the answer to that is yes, although some people have narrower fields of vision than others obviously, as you would expect. I don’t like working with investment bankers and I feel entirely confident that the reason is that they subordinate, insofar as they have those instincts, the ones that I’ve come across, tend to subordinate them to earning lots of money. I’ve got nothing wrong with earning lots of money but I don’t like the subordination of value systems to capital employment.

Another ‘leaver’, Sarah was more open in her discussion of the ethical expectations of the corporate world and the impact of this on her decision to change careers. In Sarah’s case she left a senior finance role with a market leading travel company to eventually become FD with one of the UK’s largest charities.

I was faced with the next big decision. The first time this happened, over a period of time I chose my career over my personal life and then dealt with all the personal pain that that ultimately caused me, and then I was faced with it again at [the travel company] where, I think I mentioned, my sister had this accident and became disabled, but she was initially in a coma and whatnot, and I thought here I am again, I have to choose. [The travel company] was the classic high pressure corporate: I was Group Head of Financial Planning and Analysis, so in a pretty senior role in the centre and really I felt my day to day was driven by squeezing an extra couple of pennies out of the share price and that’s really what it was down to. I had share options and whatever and stood to benefit personally from doing that, but ultimately you look at the board of directors and realise they stand to benefit a great deal from that, reputationally but also financially. I never really worried too much about all that. I had a long commute and I had long, long hours under high pressure and suddenly I was trying to fit in driving up to - she was in a critical care unit in a specialist neurological hospital in London - and I was trying to decide between staying at work to do what was expected of me, knowing then I was going to get in the car and drive up to Tooting and sit by her bedside literally. And I decided then that I wasn’t able to do both to the level that I wanted, because I tend to commit. When I commit to something I do tend to commit to it and [the travel company], although they were making the right noises about being flexible, when it came down to it, it was very, very clear that I needed to get the job done. I knew that I couldn’t do both and I thought this time I’m not going to get it wrong, so I resigned. I resigned without anything else to go to and they did, on the back of that, let me work part-time, I went down to four days so that I was able to spend time with my sister and my family. I was on six months notice and I ended up working four and a half months at the end, but I left without anything else to go to because that was my personal life prevailing over my professional life.
So that has, my decision to come here ... was partially driven by the fact that I felt that I wasn't going to put myself in a situation where I had to make that choice. I wanted to work somewhere – it just fitted in every respect. I saw all these jobs advertised in the FT and it just fitted in every respect. It was an organization and a cause that I could feel passionate about, I had a personal connection with it, I could see there was a massive professional challenge and they were, as an organization, because we support flexible working because now nearly 20% of our workforce are disabled people who have an impairment, they have a genuine commitment to work-life balance.

For Sarah, then, a personal dilemma – should she commit the hours demanded by her employees or should she care for her injured sister – initiated a career change. Her recollection “here I am again, I have to choose” is particularly evocative of Sartrean literary and dramatic dialogue. This dilemma seems to have acted as a catalyst to stiffen her resolve against the general value system in which she found herself embroiled in the corporate world. Her personal experience through this scenario also shaped her general expectations of HRM policy: her own reliance on flexible working arrangements has placed this high on her list of criteria of workplace ethicality. Sarah is happy that she can now be true to her own moral conscience in terms of fulfilling her personal obligations and working in what she considers to be an ethical HRM context.

The fourth of the “leavers” is Gill. Gill had been HR director with several large companies, most recently with a major electrical goods retailer. She chose to leave the corporate world to set up her own business as a personal trainer and masseuse. Gill’s dissatisfaction with the values of the corporate world pervaded our discussion. She expressed particular frustration at the masculine, short-term, commercially-driven culture that she had encountered, in which people came second to profit:

It’s a very difficult macho business to make a difference in – very macho, very male, talking about feelings and so on was just not on, you know, it didn’t even appear in the dictionary ... ultimately what do the guys want, what do shareholders want, what do the owners want? They want profit. They're not particularly interested actually in the welfare of the people in the business.

In realising their own authenticity, then, different participants have adopted different responses. Those responses are partly shaped by the extent to which the participant’s moral inclinations are congruent with the ethical expectations that permeate her or his organizational context. Leaders such as James and Patrick have found it possible to be true
to their own moral sensitivities without rocking the boat of organizational expectations. This happy contextual alignment derives from harmonisation of their personal commitments with the imperatives that shape their operating environment. Since their value systems are unlikely to clash with the corporate mantra of commercial maximisation, personal moral authenticity is unlikely to entail material sacrifice. Other leaders, who do not share so readily the imperatives of contemporary, Anglo-American, capitalist enterprise, have found it necessary to leave the corporate world in order to sustain their authenticity.

As a post script to this discussion of authenticity, I will briefly reflect on contrasting attitudes to the role of the leader in facilitating followers’ authenticity. In this respect, Gill’s discourse is interesting. Gill used the word “authenticity” several times to describe her experiences. I do not know if she is familiar with the use of this term in existentialist philosophy, but it figures prominently in her understanding of ethical leadership. What is particularly significant about Gill’s discourse, and what differentiates her most strikingly from some of the other aspiring “authentics” such as James and Ray, is that she values not only her own authenticity but also that of other people. For Gill, enabling others to be true to themselves is a key ingredient to ethical leadership.

I think it comes back to, through my own behaviour and therefore the knock on effect, to be honest and straightforward and courageous and to be myself. Because only by that can you actually ask others to do that. ... And authenticity I believe is absolutely fundamental to being a good leader. It isn’t necessarily, interestingly, what I think businesses want. I don’t think they want authentic leaders because authentic leaders are a little bit difficult; they’re a bit more hard to manage and to fit in. ... So, I think in terms of responsibility to the employees I think it is to behave in way which you’re asking them to behave and to create an environment in which it is safe for them to be themselves.

Authenticity, then, can take different forms, ranging from the self-assured moral autocracy exhibited by the likes of James and Ray to the moral empowerment which Gill sees as an integral aspect of leadership. Whereas the former emphasises both the inevitability and legitimacy of leaders imposing their version of moral probity on the organization, the latter stresses the capacity of leaders to enable authenticity in those who they lead.
Tension between Intersubjective Facilitation and Seeking Reassurance from a Homogenous and Supportive Community

In my discussion of intersubjective ethics I outlined the role for leadership that is indicated by the work of Habermas. Despite an apparent incongruity between Habermasian theory and received notions of "leadership", I suggested that a place for leadership can be found within the framework of intersubjectivist ethics. That intersubjectively ethical version of leadership would comprise mediation of communicative action.

I have already described how Roger conforms quite closely to the Mediator of Communication ideal type that is congruent with this version. A feature of Roger's discourse, which differentiates it from those of many other research participants, is its democratic tenor. Roger speaks of the part that he can play in evoking reflective communication amongst those internal and external stakeholders to whom he is expected to provide leadership. In contrast to the personally defined moral agendas envisaged by Moral Crusaders such as James, Roger thus presents a consultative understanding of ethical leadership; one in which the moral tone of the organization is not defined unilaterally by the leader but is shaped through intersubjective processes which the leader facilitates.

In this section I will explore the extent to which other participants share Roger's commitment to facilitating moral dialogue between diverse perspectives. In contrast, I will also examine the extent to which they tend to seek confirmation of their own moral sensitivities from members of a supportive community. In the process, I will also pay attention to the extent that a consultative approach to leadership may thrive in organizational contexts that do not share the formal democratic expectations of local government organizations such as Roger's.

If Roger's public service context is taken to be partly explicative of the attention he pays to consultation, it is perhaps unsurprising that another research participant who leads in what might be described as a "quasi-public" environment also speaks of her efforts to incorporate the views of employees in defining the values of her organization. Alison works as CEO of a regional division of Business Link and the Chamber of Commerce. As with many other research participants, Alison responded to my opening query about ethics and leadership by stressing the importance of shared values to her organization. Unlike some others though, Alison also described the consultative processes that she has put in place in order to generate those values:
I'm quite interested in the extent to which you've tried to incorporate other people's values?

Everybody. Everybody in the organization went away [to facilitated “away-days” to discuss values]. It wasn't just management team. Everybody — and some of the values... some of them aren't necessarily ones that I would have put down but they're what, you know, [for example] people wanted “to have fun”. You know, I'm not sure that I would have put that one but they felt that they should come to work and have fun... And there was another one that they wanted to put in and that was that they treated each other as they would treat external customers. Because what we were finding was that we presented a wonderful face to the outside world but we didn't present that face to each other within the organization. So that was another one. ... I would find it, in this very diverse world in which we live, I would find it very difficult to take on board an external creed and force people into it.

... And what we did, we had an away-day, where I tried to get people to tell me what they felt. Not what they thought, because I employ intelligent people and they tell me what they think all the time, you know, they walk through the door and tell me what they think. But getting people to really tell you what they feel is very, that's where they live, it's much more difficult. And we used an [other] organization to get to the bottom of some of those things and some of those values that they wanted this organization to hold close...

... And I learned a lesson that you need to listen more and speak less, if you're going to get the values — and that's when we then did the values thing, you see. And it's more about encouraging people to tell you what they feel. And it's a very fine line because having got those core values, occasionally you need to tell people what to do. And you can do all of the consultation you want but at the end of the day I will listen to everybody and then I will say “this is the way we're going”... I think I consult: the values of the organization are consultative; the vision and mission of the organizations are consultative; and then directed.

In particular, in what might be interpreted as an endorsement of pluralism, Alison remarks on the importance of listening to discrepant voices:

I think you don't listen to the spiky ones at your peril. I've got a very disparate management team; they're not all clones of me. And the quiet ones or the spiky ones who don't want to do it your way, don't think it makes any sense, if you don't listen to them, you don't learn.

Fealty to consultative definition of values is not, however, unique to public and quasi-public service organizations. Not all of the leaders that I met from private corporations eschewed broad participation in setting the company's moral agenda. For example, Jane, who is MD...
of a family owned drinks company, describes her leadership role as being that of listener and facilitator:

We're working together. ...and my job is to be a facilitator; to actually bring it together. So I'm a leader, I will listen to all the things that are put on the table. I will hopefully get consensus to what is being discussed for whatever reason. And that will be the way we go. So I don't come in and say "I want". I do sometimes... but then I have to get everybody around the table to agree that this is what we should do for the reasons and get the buy-in to that. So then you're not so likely to make huge mistakes because you've got different people with different disciplines all challenging the ideas that are put on the table.

Nigel, CEO of a large mutual building society, also spoke of the need for consultation around values:

Ultimately in this role you do things alone because you are in charge. And there are some decisions that you know you just need to draw in yourself. I guess I am a democrat by nature in terms of the role. So we've got, as you would imagine, formal management structures, different executive boards. I don't tend to keep much to myself that I don't share with other people and I think the value of debate in terms of the final judgement is key. So I'm not an autocrat. I don't sit here and say "that's how it's going to be", but ultimately I am paid to make decisions.

Yes ok. And how deep down through the organization does that sort of democratic process go? You know, if you have to make a decision to what extent would you -?

Well again it depends, because you can't have six hundred people in the core business being involved in every decision. So what we do is, in terms of alignment, hearts and minds, personal credibility, direction, all of that stuff, once a year we will kick-off; we'll get everybody in from the top team through to the maintenance guy and all of those people. And we will say "this is the picture for the next twelve months" or "three years" - whichever picture we are trying to paint. We will have sessions then, as part of those six days we do each year, where there's a: "well, give us your view" you know, "take an hour out on your table and discuss this and come back up and, you know, tell the rest of the group what you think." So I think you can engage and align, but ultimately, you can't have six hundred people making one decision.

These three passages of discourse share a common characteristic. This is that Alison, Jane and Nigel, whilst alluding to the need for consultation and reflecting on their role as leaders
in facilitating it, also mention different ways in which they reconcile their mediative role with a directive one. To repeat the relevant section of Alison’s discourse:

you can do all of the consultation you want but at the end of the day I will listen to everybody and then I will say ‘this is the way we’re going’... the values of the organization are consultative; the vision and mission of the organizations are consultative; and then directed.

So, for Alison, leadership entails calling time on intersubjective dialogue; making the final decision and then enforcing organizational commitment to that decision. Meanwhile, to reiterate Jane’s recognition that she is more insistent on some issues than on others:

I don’t come in and say “I want”. I do sometimes... but then I have to get everybody around the table to agree that this is what we should do for the reasons and get the buy-in to that.

Jane, then, reserves a leadership veto on certain matters. Similarly, although Nigel is keen to invite participation from all levels of the organizational hierarchy at periodic communication events, he echoes Jane’s contention that there are times when the leader has to take the initiative: “ultimately I am paid to make decisions ... ultimately, you can’t have six hundred people making one decision”.

So, Alison, Jane and Nigel, speaking from the contexts of business network support, a family drinks business and a mutual building society, attribute normative significance to consultation around values. However, each offers slightly different ways of reconciling “leadership” with consultation to that suggested by Roger. Roger focuses on the part that he can play, as a leader, in evoking critical reflection. Alison alludes to the role of the leader as chairperson and enforcer. Jane and Nigel reflect on the need for the leader to, on occasions, take unilateral decisions and build support for those decisions. Whereas Roger’s discourse draws attention to the role that a leader can play in enhancing the quality of processes of intersubjective engagement by encouraging reflexiveness, these other participants dwell on the need for the leader to sometimes cut short or bypass those processes.

But if Alison, Jane and Nigel’s intersubjective fealty is restricted in this manner, a far more common form of restriction is to limit the universe of discourse. The attitude towards intersubjectivity that I encountered most frequently is to limit participation in consultation in a manner that is likely to be preclusive of diversity. In particular, consultation tends to be limited to a narrow group of professional and social peers. For example, Robert describes
Robert, then, acknowledges the limitations of his own moral perspicacity. But the intersubjective court of appeal to which he turns to compensate for restrictions to his own acuity is limited to senior managers and directors. In a similar vein, Mark describes how he depends upon fellow board members when confronted with a moral dilemma:

"You've talked about how you like to have firm principles and you stick by your principles ... have you found there's a bit of a grey area outside those rules where you feel a little uncomfortable?"

Yes I think there are grey areas and I think inevitably when you're sitting on a board you will come across those grey areas. There isn't a simple answer and there very rarely is. There's usually, if you've got good experience and good principles around the board table, a way through all of those and that is best course, if you will. There's no right or wrong but you can, at the end of it, agree that, "yep that's within my principles, it's within everyone's principles; [it's] probably the right way to go" ... that's how a good board works I think. But equally, you've got to have diversity on a board as well. If you have a lot of people who think – I mean you've got a religious sect haven't you in a business sense. That wouldn't be much good I wouldn't have thought.

Mark suggests that he may also augment input from fellow directors with contributions from mentors and consultants:
Given that type of situation where you have a moral dilemma, you mentioned that you discussed it with your mentor. Is that something that you're prone to do, to talk things through?

Yes. I've been very lucky. [During ]my time at [a former employer] I had a very good mentor and I also had some very good friends [mentions two other MD/CEO figures who he previously worked with] and I think you need to be able to talk to people ... The other mentor I had was then when I went to [a major retail consortium]. I was there for ten years and I had a mentor, again one of the senior directors, a lady this time, and she remains a mentor now and has been in my current company that I've just left. I think they are very important and the reason for it is just to be able to talk something through and have someone listen. They rarely make decisions for you, in fact virtually never if they're good, but they will ask questions that you've already asked yourself but they'll put it in a different way and make you think and make you argue it through. I found that very helpful ...

Would you discuss with those mentors value-based issues as well as strictly business issues?

Yes I would. I also was fortunate to find a couple of people - consultants if you will - one took as a principal foundation of his teachings this thing of "positive mental attitude". I've always found that a very attractive and very positive way of looking at things generally. The other is a lady who also has done a lot of work on building teams and leadership and devolving leadership and actually dealing with emotional intelligence ... and she is particularly good at discussing things on a broader scale.

Max also acknowledges the importance of gathering input from peers as well as sounding out views from outside of the organization:

So what was the process, what sort of processes, thought processes, did you go through in reaching the decision [to make some people redundant]?

I talked to quite a lot of people... Anyone that I felt needed to judge whether the decision was right. So some of them were my colleagues, some of them were – one of them was [the owner of the business] ... And I always talk things through with [my wife], you know, someone from afar. Sometimes I had reference points of friends who I respect.

Are there any particular individuals that you refer to on a regular basis through your career?
Yes, there are. Two or three people, if I’m really thinking: is this right or wrong or what’s your view? I would, if I’m struggling I always appreciate their view. You don’t have to do what they say but I appreciate their view.

Yes. Well, what is it about those people that’s made you select them as a –?

I see qualities in them that I aspire to myself. I admire the way they make decisions and it always seems to be fair and equitable, well thought through and done in a way that, an even handed way. They’re always, you know, that’s – Yes. That’s what it is, yes.

These accounts might be interpreted as willingness to seek diverse inputs to morally-charged decisions. However, an alternative interpretation is that they reveal an inclination to reference moral decision-making against the value system of a professional and social peer group that is likely to deliver a reassuringly homogenous response. Notwithstanding Mark’s approbation of diversity around a board table, it is questionable whether the range of perspectives accessed through consultation with fellow directors, mentors, business consultants and close family members will introduce radically new perspectives to the leader’s moral horizon. It seems more likely that consulting within this constituency will offer comforting reinforcement of the leader’s inveterate moral commitments.

Despite a willingness to consult around moral decision-making, then, consultation is most often limited to the peer group of the leader. Participants are more inclined to seek advice from within a socially homogenous circle of colleagues, friends and relatives than to engage with perspectives that may offer radically new insights. The views of junior employees, in particular, tend to be excluded from decision making processes. Robert alludes to a possible explanation of this. He describes the range of measures that he has put in place to enable engagement with different stakeholders. However, he suggests that participation in these processes by junior employees tends to be inhibited by reticence on their part.

I have a sort of a policy, I mean for instance I am the sort of manager that has an open door policy ... so I like to be involved with the employees ... And I think that’s quite important in management that you are as fairly open as you can be. You can’t always be. But I think you need to be as open as you can and then you, you know, it’s surprises and bad communication I think that make for poor leadership.

Yes, ok. What you refer to as an open door policy; can you give me an idea, any example, of how that actually operates in terms of employees?
In terms of employees, I mean I have structured meetings during the day but I have periods in my day where the door is left open for people to come in and interact with me on a regular basis. I also, rather than just them having to come in here, I walk around the building at least three times a day and just go to every department and just make sure that they can see me ... And I think it's better to try and encourage them to have some dialogue with you and not be intimidated and think you're part of the team as well as they are and everybody's necessary. You know, I mean, I'm just a necessary evil that controls the whole thing.

But it's a tough thing to do for a junior employee to walk in here and feel -

Well they don't tend to walk in here. What happens then is, if I'm walking round the building then they, you know, that sort of thing. But we do, you know, I do encourage, if I sense there's areas in the business that aren't quite right, I go back to HR and say "well I think that person isn't quite right", so I sense there is something wrong...

So does it tend to be more managers that come in and talk to you than -

Yes it would tend to be more the middle managers and senior managers that would come in here and talk to me. From a general point of view then it would be the senior managers.

So, despite Robert's consultative aspirations, the constituency of intersubjective participation is limited by reticence on the part of junior employees. Robert also remarks that junior employees are disinclined to contribute to more substantial matters during formal meetings, restricting their input to housekeeping issues. He reflects on the reasons why this might be so:

Because at an employee forum level they actually talk about issues that are important to them that, you know, could be "the fridge hasn't been cleaned out for a long time", or "why do we have to pay for our coffee?"... things like that: "we always have to go to Tesco for our sandwiches because the catering is disgusting", or something. Those sorts of things you get from the employees, you know, and they are normal human things.

Yes, sort of housekeeping things.

Yes, more sort of housekeeping things, but very important to them...

Yes. Do you think the employees feed in to that commercial debate with their managers?
I think some do. I think some people naturally, I mean, people aren’t sheep, people are people. They all have their own characters and some people are more able to express themselves better and some people want to express themselves better, and they will engage with their managers or they might engage with me, you know. And other people are very quiet and don’t communicate particularly well and don’t feel they would be listened to if they did and they sort of, and those people are a bit of a problem.

Robert’s suggestion that junior employees’ inhibitions may derive from their sense that they “don’t feel they would be listened to if they did” is an interesting point. It suggests that an open ear on the part of a leader is not the only prerequisite to consultative engagement; leaders may also need to think creatively about how they may overcome potential barriers to communication in order to enable contribution to consultative fora from marginalised groups.

Two participants actually comment on the fact that the world inhabited by organizational leaders is likely to be preclusive of perspectival heterogeneity. It is perhaps significant that both of these people are “leavers” who I referred to in the previous section; that is, people who have left their previous boardroom lives behind them; one to take up a role as Finance Director with one of the country’s largest charities and one to work as a self-employed change consultant. Thus, Sarah suggests that, in her experience, the homogenous profile of many senior management groups tends to preclude diversity of perspectives:

Again, since [working for a charity] I’ve been able to look back at [a former employer, one of the country’s leading travel companies], for example, where the senior finance team was the most un-diverse, if that’s a word, team that I’ve ever been part of. I think I was the only female in the senior finance team, the group finance director, and the profile of them was all practically identical: all male, all roughly between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five; all straight; married with two children; just absolutely clones of one another, if you like. I hadn’t ever really questioned in my mind whether that, I was vaguely aware that when you’re in a minority as in the gender minority there, but never questioned whether there’s any weakness in that or the strength that diversity can bring … there wasn’t even a female member of the executive board - there were a couple of female non-exec directors, I think – let alone anybody from any form of ethnic minority or sexuality, whatever.

Dennis also suggests that the rarefied circles within which they move may alienate corporate leaders from “ordinary” voices, a factor which may prevent exposure to views that differ from their own:
I don't come across many people in my walk of life who I would think are, you know, the forces of evil and darkness. Most people I come across and talk to, once they get out of their corporate straightjackets, as far as they wear them, they seem to be pretty decent people with their hearts in the right place and a value system that seems by and large to be very honourable. ... I think the difficulty ... of people who have influence ... then reverts to: how open do they remain, once they get to these positions of power and influence, to a whole range of influence from fairly ordinary people? And my experience, so far, is that they don't remain very open to that, not because they don't wish to but because they just move in some very rarefied circles and you can only spend your time once. And they're quite used to spending it with movers and shakers; people who have influence; in very protected environments. And the impact of day-to-day drudgery and the ordinary lives are, sort of, taken away by flunkies and money.

To summarise, some other participants share Roger's approbation of consultation in setting the organization's moral tone and in responding to morally charged issues. However, their expressions of intersubjective fealty tend to be more reserved than Roger's. While this may lend credence to the view that Roger's public sector context is explicative of his democratic style, it still leaves unanswered the question whether a similar level of consultation would be morally desirable in alternative settings: even if the public sector is unique in its support of consultation, it does not necessarily follow that other types of organization would not be morally improved by a dose of intersubjectivity; is does not necessarily imply ought.

Restrictions to the breadth of consultation most commonly take the form of excluding voices outside of the leaders social and professional peer group. Consequently, the consultation that does take place is unlikely to enable representation of diverse perspectives. Although such consultation may offer a reassuring sounding board to leaders, it is doubtful whether it will present a meaningful challenge to their pre-existing views.

Non-management employees are least likely to be represented in leaders' decision making. Reticence on the part of those junior employees is offered as a reason for this. If this reticence is to be overcome, a creative and sensitive response on the part of leaders is called for. In particular, if leaders wish to hear the voices of non-management employees, they need to make available communication media and consultation fora in which those employees feel comfortable giving voice to their views. Given that most participants do not appear to place much importance on the views of non-management employees, such investment seems unlikely.
Some participants go so far as to reflect on the homogeneity of the world inhabited by organizational leaders, suggesting that this will inevitably restrict access to discrepant voices. However, the majority seem comfortable with the guidance and support which access to this restricted peer group permits.
5.3 CONSIDERING SOME MORAL CONCERNS WITH LEADERSHIP

So far in this empirical report I have identified three “ideal type” ways in which leaders might think about the ethical dimension of their role. I have indicated a qualified degree of congruence between these ideal types and the three meta-ethical perspectives that I discussed during my review of the ethics literature. I have also explored in greater detail a particular characteristic of each of these ideal type approaches. This exploration has focused on particular tensions that are associated with the application of the corresponding meta-ethical perspectives to the subject of organizational leadership. In this third and last section of my empirical review, I propose to use empirical data to add further insights to the issues around which I structured my earlier discussion of the leadership literature. Specifically, I will explore the way that research participants think about two particular issues examined in that leadership literature review: the moral probity of the goals towards which leaders lead; and the extent to which leadership may be inherently erosive of the agency of followers.

This last section of my empirical report therefore begins by discussing some contrasting ways that participants assess the moral desirability of the objectives towards which they lead. It then goes on to look at some contrasting perspectives to the issue of followers’ agency. I will end by reflecting once more upon the three ideal type exemplars with which I began this empirical report. This time, I will draw on the discourses of these three participants to illustrate contrasting approaches, not to the agency of followers, but to the agency of the leader.

The Moral Probity of the Outcomes of Leadership

The first issue considered in my review of the leadership literature concerns the moral rectitude of the outcomes of leadership. More particularly, it concerns the question: how can leaders, and those who evaluate the ethicality of leadership, be sure that leaders are applying their exceptional influencing skills to bring about morally desirable, rather than morally undesirable, outcomes? In my literature review, I discussed some ways in which the leadership literature addresses this question. I drew attention to the emphasis that some commentators place on the distinction between altruistic and egotistic motivation in a leader. The assumption made by these commentators is that altruistic intent offers some reassurance of the ethicality of a leader’s agenda. I pointed out that this distinction overlooks the hazard of narrowly defined altruism: that, by prioritising the interests and aspirations of their followers, leaders may overlook the broader moral implications of that agenda. I drew attention to different ways of approaching this hazard. Some commentators
adopt a characteristically managerialist approach, putting faith in the personal moral perspicuity of leaders; in their capacity to unilaterally identify and respond to these broader moral challenges. On the other hand, by focusing on the consultative aspects of effective leadership, other commentators strike a tone that is more redolent of a critical perspective and which also places a less onerous burden of moral sagacity on leaders.

In this section, I will explore the way that research participants respond to the challenge of assuring the ethicality of their agenda. My discussion so far has already revealed some different attitudes to this issue. Some participants judge moral legitimacy with reference to the code of a defined community. In the case of David, the Company Man, that code is enshrined in the traditions of the organization, while other participants are more inclined to seek validation of their moral agenda within a community of professional and social peers. A second approach is to trust in the acuity of the leader’s moral judgement. This approach is articulated most explicitly by James, the Moral Crusader but also emerges in the discourses of some other participants. The third option, expressed most emphatically by Roger, the Mediator of Communication, is to rely on consultative processes in order to assess moral legitimacy.

I will now explore further the way that leaders approach the question of moral legitimation. I will begin by considering the extent to which participants reflect on the wider impact of their organizations on society and on the environment. Some do this readily, although a presupposition of the moral rectitude of the organization’s role in society is more common: that the organization “does good by doing well” is generally taken for granted. Where participants do dwell on the moral impact of their organization, this reflection tends to be confined to consideration of how to ameliorate any negative side effects of the organization’s survival and prosperity. The overall desirability of that survival and prosperity, along with its morally beneficent consequences, are not generally questioned. This, perhaps, is only to be expected: it would be surprising to find participants questioning the moral legitimacy of the organizations that they lead with such vigour; a little like turkeys offering a normative justification for traditional Christmas feasting.

I will elaborate shortly on the way in which participants privilege the prosperity and survival of the organization. I will also reflect on the rationales that they offer for this preoccupation and on its implications. Before doing so, however, I propose to discuss some different accounts offered by the few who do reflect on the wider impact of their organizations and on the rectitude of that impact. I focus on these particular accounts
because they demonstrate some contrasting ways of evaluating the moral desirability of the organization’s social and environmental impact.

**The impact of the organization**

Several participants readily reflect on the role played by their organization within a wider societal or environmental context. I will describe three contrasting accounts, those of Patrick, Roger and James. Whereas Patrick offers a strikingly unilateral approach to the assessment of the moral desirability of the objectives towards which he leads, Roger and James are more responsive to the moral expectations of other people. However, despite the apparent shared intersubjective sensitivity of Roger’s and James’s accounts, I will draw attention to a significant difference between them.

Patrick, who spent eighteen years as MD with a major brewing and pub owning company, reflects on the capacity of the pub trade to play a positive role in society:

The pub business I've always been so proud of ... there are vast tracts of this country, those '50s and '60s housing estates, where if there wasn’t a pub there, there would be no social infrastructure. There'd be nothing at all. And the good that a well-run pub in a council estate does can be fantastic. The purpose in other places is to provide an atmosphere where you can do the most important things in life which is to eat and drink in a convivial and pleasant manner. So I've always felt that the industry I've worked for was a force for good. Always, always. ... my happiest memories are always associated with pubs, as most people's are, you know, the birth of your child you go and have a beer, you have a beer at your wedding ...

... you mentioned that the thing that gave you satisfaction about being involved with the pub business is because it was adding something to people's lives, adding things to the community. Why is that important?

I do believe that people need company; they need stimulation; they need fellowship. I mean, yes, I do believe in society; I don't believe you can ignore how people interact ... I don't know anybody who is proud of the fact that he sits indoors all the time on his own. No, no.

I will recount a relevant passage of Roger's discourse before considering how it differs from Patrick's approach. Roger, remember, is CEO of a large, rural county council.

There is a principle ... an issue about "social morality", which is the best term I can think to use, but because it's such a fluffy term I prefer to try to avoid using it as an expression, but
it is something that joins those issues together. I mean if you believe as I believe, not in a
fluffy way, about an ethos of public service. And it’s quite easy in an area like this, because ...
if you serve an area like [this county], to use European terms and not party political
terms, even though we have a wide variety of representation, the community we serve is
effectively social democrat. So they are not going to let old people die, they are not going to
fail to educate young people and they wouldn’t want to be biased against young people from
different backgrounds or people with different disabilities. So if you start from that base in
terms of the society that we serve, and obviously that’s a huge generalisation, I am not
suggesting every member of the community comes in to that category, but there’s a broad
consensus out there around the core. That’s how we ought to be managing the area. That’s a
strength in the community which we then need to reflect in the way that we add to that.

Ok, so there’s a sense that because of the political, in a constitutional sense, nature of the
organization that you represent in the community, the values that you adhere to need to be
reflective of the values of those people.

Yes.

A notable contrast between Patrick’s and Roger’s approaches is that the moral legitimation
offered by Patrick is highly personal. He makes a unilateral assessment about what is in the
best interests of the public; assessments upon which he bases his evaluations of the moral
rectitude of his industry’s social impact. Thus, Patrick takes the beneficent role of pubs in
everyone’s life as a given and deduces from this the morally uplifting capacity of the pub
trade. However, Patrick’s contention is contestable. It is unlikely that his veneration of the
pub as a social focus would meet with universal agreement. Some people may even suggest
that some pubs do more harm than good in community terms. Roger, on the other hand,
alludes to the leader’s need to respond to a very different court of moral appeal. Rather than
relying on his own sense of right and wrong, Roger speaks of the need to respond to the
moral expectations of the community that he serves. It is, therefore, that community which
sets the standards of right and wrong by which he judges the moral legitimacy of his
organization’s activities.

Now, it might be suggested that this difference in emphasis is explained by the difference
between the governance context within which Roger works and that to which Patrick is
accustomed. Roger is accountable to a group of democratically elected councillors whereas
Patrick has spent most of his career with private organizations. While it is appropriate for a
council to respond to the expectations of the community that it serves, leaders of privately-
funded organizations are perhaps encouraged to adopt a more unilateral approach to moral evaluation.

This is where James's observations are of interest. James, like Patrick, has spent his career in the private sector. James also takes seriously the wider impact of his business, this time reflecting on the ecological dimension. James runs an executive travel business and, as a major buyer and seller of air travel, is very conscious of his business's environmental effect.

I mentioned to you CSR, which we talk about day in and day out in our business because corporate social responsibility is such a huge thing when it comes to business travel that it's affecting our business and that is everything to do with the health and safety of people. But also it's becoming so much broader and the environmental piece is a big part of that. We are doing a huge amount on the environmental side which, I feel, not just from a business point of view we should do certainly, but morally and from a personal responsibility point of view we should do.

James goes on to make the point that, although he believes there is an intrinsic imperative to take environmentalism seriously, he also needs to respond to the expectations of his business's stakeholders. He had spoken earlier of the need to respond to customer expectations, but he also refers to the need for his company's environmental policies to be in line with the expectations of its employees.

About a year ago there was a lot of hype being generated about "green" and everyone was suddenly talking about it. And a lot of people, lots of cynics, were saying "oh this is just another fad. This is another bird-flu and it will go away". And also a lot of people [were] saying that companies were riding on the bandwagon because it seemed to be the trendy thing to do, you know, from the commercial point of view, [to] jump on the trend. And what's happened in the last year is really quite interesting in that, I would say, about halfway through the year it started to move from being a fad and something that people jumped on the bandwagon to becoming really serious. That all sort of started to happen because things like the Stern Report were coming out and stuff like and on the national agenda it becoming a bigger thing. Now people are talking about it really seriously.

... And my point is that, people at home, our people in this company, our employees are people. They are individuals. At home they are increasingly being exposed to recycling. They are getting more keen on doing their piece; they are looking at how much tax they pay on the car because of carbon emissions; they are going to be buying food in Tesco's, Sainsbury's and other things with carbon labels on them and whether they are flown into the
country or not and it's becoming a part of peoples lives. When they go to work they don't expect that to be a different world. When they go to work they expect the company to be responsible about recycling paper and those things companies have been doing for some time but, in a sense, [have] became a token gesture, but they expect [the company] to be responsible about those things, about plastic cups at the vending machine. Increasingly this affects us. They expect the company to be responsible about the hotel they book them into, and the airline that they book them onto, because those things are also now becoming key factors. So the company, our company and all the companies that we deal with, have a sort of push-and-pull thing going on. You have your people that are increasingly going to demand things of you and saying, “well why aren’t we being responsible at work?” and we have a responsibility to them to do that.

James’s emphasis on the moral expectations of his stakeholders contrasts with the habitual self-confidence in his personal moral evaluation that he manifests elsewhere. James’s observations imply that, in order to be successful, business leaders must adopt a consultative stance towards moral legitimation. However, confident they may be in their personal moral proclamations, leaders must, in order to succeed, temper their unilateral moral assessments to the expectations of others.

James’s commitment to the stewardship of the organization therefore calls for an intersubjective sensitivity that is, in some respects, similar to Roger’s democratic proclivity. In this sense, it is just as important for a private-sector organization to respond to the moral expectations of the community that it serves as it is for a local council. However, despite the apparent similarity in Roger and James’s articulations of stakeholder sensitivity, there is a notable difference between them. That difference lies in the composition of the group to whom Roger and James appeal for moral legitimation. In Roger’s case, it is the community served by his council, which is likely to comprise all those people who, in some way, are affected by the activities of his organization. In James’s case, the court of moral appeal comprises those upon whom the prosperity of his organization depends. The difference might therefore be summed up as that between a relationship of affect and a relationship of dependency.

This distinction is important. Roger offers what might be called an intrinsic normative stakeholding legitimation of his organization’s activities. In other words, Roger’s decisions, and the activities of his organization, are morally legitimated by their responsiveness to the expectations of all those who are affected by them. James, on the other hand, offers an instrumental normative stakeholding justification. The reason why James responds to the expectations of his stakeholders is that doing so helps him to promote a further goal to
which he attaches moral value; in this case the prosperity of his organization. Whereas, for Roger, his stakeholders’ expectations have intrinsic moral value, for James the value of his stakeholders is contingent upon their contribution to that further moral target.

To make this distinction is not to deny the moral tone of James’s rationale. Indeed, James feels as strongly about the moral justification that he thus proposes as does Roger. However, it is important to distinguish their respective foci of moral legitimation. Roger attributes moral significance to the people who are affected by his organization’s activities. James, on the other hand, attributes moral significance to the survival and prosperity of his organization (although, as I will elaborate later, even this significance may be contingent upon its contribution to a further moral goal). The stakeholders of whom James speaks are only significant insofar as they are important to the achievement of that moral purpose.

This distinction has an important implication. This is that the groups of stakeholders to whom these different approaches respond are not necessarily the same: although there may be some overlap, the stakeholders who are affected by the activities of an organization may not be the same as the stakeholders upon whom it depends for its survival and prosperity. Roger’s consultative tone is redolent of Habermasian ideal speech insofar as his decision making is responsive to the expectations of the constituency that is affected by those decisions. James’s stakeholder sensitivity, on the other hand, falls short of Habermasian ideals in that large sections of the constituency that is affected by his decisions may be unrepresented in those decisions.

**Defining the universe of moral relevance**

I will now elaborate on the emphasis that most participants place on the survival and prosperity of their organization as a moral goal. I will approach this question, firstly, by considering the question of the *universe of moral relevance*. In other words, by identifying those individuals or groups that participants consider to be relevant to their moral decision making.

One indication of participants’ perceptions of moral relevance is offered by their responses to my questioning about responsibilities. I asked most participants if they think that their leadership role entails responsibilities to any particular groups. This question tended to elicit reference to a range of stakeholders but most prominent amongst these are employees. For example, Patrick describes the sense of responsibility to those people who worked for him during his time in pub management:
When you are adopting that leadership role within a business context are you conscious of any responsibilities, duties to any particular groups or individuals?

I think you are very much so. I mean as I say I was always very keen indeed to make sure that the attitude surveys that were done amongst the companies within our group that we scored highest for satisfaction and motivation.

Among the staff?

Amongst staff. My responsibility has always been how I felt the staff related and whether they felt respected... I mean I've always said that if there were two phone calls before I went out I would always answer the pub manager before I'd answer the chairman, always felt that. Whether that's the right way or not of doing it and in many ways it isn't, but I always felt that I looked after them always, always.

Mark also reflects on his experience in the pub trade to focus on his responsibility towards his employees:

When you are fulfilling a [business leadership] role of that nature are there any particular groups or individuals to whom you feel you have responsibilities?

Employees of the business. I think the example of the pub and you know we're going to change its entire direction and its product ... you have just as much responsibility to the cleaner in that pub as you have anyone else ... I think that is a big responsibility and in fact if anything that's the one I pay most attention to, rather like Richard Branson. I think the major stakeholders in any business in that sense are the people who work in it.

So, when I asked specifically about leadership responsibilities, employees figure prominently as the focus of participants' moral sensitivities; as the most morally relevant group. But perhaps a more spontaneous expression of participants' sense of responsibility towards different people is offered in the context of general discussion. The group towards which a sense of responsibility is most commonly averred is, again, the employees of the organization. For example, whilst discussing his feelings towards his employees David notes that:

...you feel responsible for them. That's point number one. So every single employee that I have whether it's in Holland, because we've got factories in Holland, in France, in the UK, in Ireland, you feel responsible. And that responsibility can also bring a burden. I talk a lot
about the burdens of leadership because everybody aspires to be the boss but there carries a huge amount of burden with it.

Robert is acutely conscious of a responsibility towards his employees and also towards their families:

I mean you are responsible for people's lives....

You mention there that you feel responsible for people's lives, why? Why are you responsible for them as a manager?

Why?

Yes.

Well, because they rely on me for their families, if they've got families and you know, without a job here what happens to them?

While these observations offer a glimpse into participants' universe of moral relevance, perhaps the most revealing insights come from their accounts of moral dilemmas. Participants may pay lip service to the moral significance of employees when specifically asked about this, but their most sincere commitments are likely to emerge from their accounts of concrete instances when they have had to choose between conflicting responsibilities. In this respect, a common picture emerges: this is that the ultimate reference point for moral decision-making is the survival and prosperity of the organization. When leaders have to make hard choices, the good of the organization is generally upheld as the weathervane of moral probity. Despite the high profile of employees in participants' universe of moral relevance, when choices have to be made between employees and the organization, the organization comes first. For example, Jane describes dilemmas in which she has to balance the good of the organization against the interests of specific employees. In such situations, the morally-right course is clear to her:

You know, making people redundant is quite a difficult thing. And the moral dilemma there is you're giving someone the sack as such. So to them it's really terrible because their livelihood is going to go by the wayside.... But then you've also got a bigger picture to look after. So if you don't do that you're not going to save, you know, the rest of the business. So those are the sorts of things which are difficult. And you have to be right, you
have to be sure that you are doing it for the right reasons; is it necessary to do it for the right reasons...

Yes. And the right reasons being the, this point that we've talked about already that –

What it is you're here to do.

Yes. Which in your case is the –

To keep the business going.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that participants offer the prosperity of the organization as a categorical good. They do not tend to hold out the good of the organization as, in itself, an overriding criterion of moral evaluation. More usually, the survival and prosperity of the organization is valued insofar as it is promotes the interests of those people who depend upon it. Thus, Sarah, reflecting on her experiences as a director of a small airline, offers the greater good of the "wider group" as a justification for the trauma associated with a redundancy programme:

That was the first time that I'd ever gone through a redundancy programme at all in my career and I found that horrifically difficult....What makes me do it? ...Well, again, I look at the other stakeholders. I think there were about thirty-odd engineers in that instance and I talk about it easily now but at the time I was in pieces; I found it personally extremely difficult. We had guys in their mid-fifties in tears and it's incredibly difficult ... but I have to look at the wider group.

Here, Sarah presents the interests of "the wider group" of employees as her rationale for job losses: she takes moral reassurance for the harsh measures that she has to implement from her belief that these measures are necessary to ensure the survival of the organization and thus the interests of the majority of employees. Therefore, although the organization takes priority over group of employees in her moral decision-making, this is because the interests of the wider group of employees is identified with the survival the organization: the many take precedence over the few in a utilitarian-style moral calculation. However, the survival of the organization need not be directly at issue for this utilitarian rationale to be put forward. Even when its survival is not threatened, the prosperity of the organization is nevertheless advanced as a moral justification for HR efficiency measures. Jane uses the example of a local rival to illustrate how a business that fails to pay attention to efficiencies can find itself on an unstoppable slide down the slippery slope to failure:
Presumably, there are often situations where it’s not a life and death situation.

Yeah. But you don’t know when it’s going to be death, look at [a local rival]. You know, they came up against something which was slowly getting worse and worse and worse. And it became terminal and they had, you know, and it was sold.

James also alludes to his responsibility to retain maximum efficiency, specifically reflecting on how this is consistent with the interests of the majority of employees. Again, James offers this as a moral justification for making people redundant:

It’s also validated by the responsibility you have to everybody because if you compromise on those decisions, the company doesn’t perform so well, you might then have to make some [more] people redundant. If you make the right decision you are being more responsible to everybody else in the business because you are doing the best for the business which is then doing the best for them. So you are doing the best for the majority in effect, but at the cost of some individual.

So, even behind participants moral prioritisation of the survival and prosperity of the organization there generally sits a valuation of employees’ interests. Employees remain at the centre of participants’ universe of moral relevance. However, employees are not the only group to be valorised by participants. For example, Nigel, CEO of a mutual building society, reflects on the importance of the members of the society. In this case he places their interests, which are realised through the survival and prosperity of the society, before those of a particular group of employees in justifying redundancy:

Does that leader/follower relationship, for want of better phrase, does that create any particular responsibilities on your part, do you feel?

Lots and lots, yes. You know and sometimes they are quite tough. We made people redundant last year, you know; we don’t do that lightly. You know they’ve got mortgages to pay and children to feed and all of that emotional stuff. So it does put a fairly significant burden. Now you know, again, I always say to myself: “well actually, you know, I’m doing what I genuinely believe is right” ...

... In that sort of situation, how do you morally legitimise to yourself taking that sort of action; as you say making people redundant is a big deal, it’s a big deal for them.

Yes
How do you come to terms with that? On what sort of basis do you -?

When you go back to 1860, the founding principles of the building society were you know you run for current and future members best interests. And there lies the answer.

Broadening the range of beneficiary groups still further, Jane identifies the survival of her family-owned cider company with the interests of a wide range of dependent stakeholders:

It's not only us, it's all our employees, all our local farmers. Their main crop now is cider apples. We're not only looking after us as shareholders, as directors, but we've got the employees, we've got our suppliers. There's a huge knock-on effect.... so I need to keep the company sound and that would be looking after everybody that's involved with the business. So whether it's a shareholder, whether it's an employee, whether it's a supplier or whether it's a customer.

Some participants even mention shareholders as morally significant beneficiaries, although often in grudging terms or as an afterthought. However, despite these occasional references to other stakeholder groups who depend on the organization, employees came across throughout my research discussions as the most morally significant group. An overwhelmingly common, though not unanimous, moral rationale is that employees, and also their families, are morally important and that the survival and prosperity of the organization is therefore the moral Holy Grail because this ensures the interests of the majority of employees. This could be characterised as a rule utilitarian rationale: the moral rule of organizational prosperity is privileged above all others because this is believed to lead to the greatest good for the greatest number of morally relevant people. And the morally relevant people identified by most participants are their employees.

It is perhaps significant that the moral dilemmas upon which participants dwell nearly always involve harm to small groups of employees. The ethically challenging scenarios described by participants, either spontaneously or in response to my specific request to identify a moral dilemma, generally concern situations in which groups of employees have lost out. In most cases, these scenarios involve redundancy. However, this is not always the case. For example, Alison offers an account in which she presents the survival of her organization, and thus the greater good of the majority of employees and their families, as a moral justification for “dissembling” on her part. In this conversation, Alison had just reflected on the vagaries of funding decisions for the business network support organization of which she is CEO; a discussion which initiated the following exchange.
Have you encountered any situations where, you know, for example, you know that the project is going to run out of funding in six months time, this project is extremely important, results continue to be extremely important for that six month period? Where the people who are involved in that project don't know that the funding is coming to an end? Where you've had to wrestle with –

Dissemble?

Well, when you've had to make the decision as to whether to tell them or not?

Yeah.

Okay.

That's a very tricky one... The first thing that I would say is that it's happened a couple of times. And subsequently to that, because it has been difficult, it's been a problem I've wrestled over ... But yes, I have dissembled. And I told one individual because I thought they were resilient enough to cope. And I didn't tell another individual until three months before the end of the contract.

And what –

Why did I make the different distinction? One was because I knew the individual really well and I thought that she could cope with knowing that that was going [to happen]. I also wanted to retain her services in the organization. And I wanted her to apply for the jobs that I knew were coming up. In the other case, the individual was – I didn't see his long term future with the organization. And I knew that if he'd been told his results would have gone out of the window.

... On what basis, why did you do that? What was the motivation to do that?

The health of the organization supports currently one-hundred-and-twenty-eight families. You've only got to see the Christmas party, where suddenly your responsibilities are clear. When you see four hundred people who depend on you getting it right. And at the end of the day, the health of the many support the decisions you make about the few.

It is notable that Alison's story, although it does not revolve around redundancy, involves dissembling to an employee. Alison's discomfort about dissembling derives from her concern about mistreating an employee. So even though her story does not involve
redundancy, it nevertheless concerns harm to an employee insofar as she keeps her true intentions from that employee. This feature characterised all but one of my research discussions. Every participant told me of a story whose dilemmatic quality stemmed from its detrimental impact on a small group of employees, either through redundancy or through other forms of harm (the sole exceptions to this was Dennis’s account from his days in financial services when he and his fellow directors debated whether to inform endowment mortgage holders that their policies were unlikely to cover the cost of their house purchase). This further underlines the moral relevance of employees in the eyes of research participants: not only are employees morally relevant as the potential beneficiaries of organizational prosperity; the most troubling decisions taken by leaders to ensure this prosperity tend to involve employees losing out. The dilemmatic quality of these scenarios almost invariably derives from their injurious consequences to small groups of employees.

To summarise this section, the basis of moral evaluation that emerges most strongly is the prosperity of the organization. This, in turn, is valued insofar as it promotes the interests of those who depend upon it; the organization’s survival and prosperity is taken as proxy for the interests of these various groups. Particular emphasis is placed on the employees who stand to lose or gain from changes in the organization’s fortunes. Although some participants also emphasise the interests of other stakeholders, including shareholders, suppliers, and customers, employees are most commonly named as the morally relevant beneficiaries of the organization’s survival and prosperity. The moral significance of employees is further underlined by the regularity with which they feature as the losers in participants’ accounts of moral dilemmas: it is the harm caused to employees that makes these scenarios dilemmatic.

*Basis for attributing moral relevance*

So the picture that emerges thus far is that the universe of moral relevance valorised by participants usually comprises employees, although it sometimes also includes other stakeholders who depend upon the organization. Therefore, leadership objectives are considered to be moral insofar as they promote the interests of employees and those other stakeholders. Since those interests are most likely to be promoted through the survival and prosperity of this organization, ensuring that survival and prosperity becomes leaders’ prime moral objective.

It is instructive to also consider why the interests of these particular groups, especially employees, are accorded moral relevance: why do these people matter morally so much to
leaders? Participants’ responses to this question fall into several different categories. The first category received one isolated contribution. This is that there is a sort of social-contractual basis for business’s responsibilities towards the society within which it trades. Thus Dennis, former director with a major financial-services provider, adopts the perspective of an employee to offer the following rationale:

Now, in my quirky, individualistic morality, I believe we’ve sort of signed up to capitalism, so, as an employee, I have signed up for capitalism: I obey certain rules; observe certain things about the way our society operates; I’m part of that and all the rest of it. Well, I think, turning that around, that there’s a duty of care of those who benefit most from capitalism to look to me.

A second explanation for moral relevance is proximity and familiarity. I have already described, in my earlier discussion of consistent application of principles, the partiality that some participants show towards those who are closest to them and the challenge that this presents to consistency.

But the third, most commonly cited, basis for inclusion in the universe of moral relevance echoes my previous discussion about affect: those groups who are affected by the activities of an organization are seen as those who should be taken into account in moral evaluation of its activities. This is clearly articulated by James’s description of his sense of responsibility for his employees:

The right way and the responsible way is to say, I have got fourteen hundred people, if you like, that sit under my influence, in the shadow that I create as a leader and the culture that I create, because it does emanate from me in many respects, and you know one of the things I can influence is in trying to ensure that we have a genuine care for people and we have a genuine desire to try and create a social, a work life balance...

However, as I pointed out earlier, it is important to differentiate between relationships of affect and relationships of dependency. I often encountered ambivalence on this issue during my discussions: participants were sometimes unclear about whether their sense of responsibility for stakeholders who are affected by their business emanates from that affect relationship or from a dependency relationship; in other words from the fact that those stakeholders exercise influence over the survival and prosperity of their organization. The following discussion, in which Ray speaks of his feelings of responsibility for employees, colleagues and, in particular, for customers, is illustrative of this ambiguity:
Are you conscious of any particular responsibilities to any groups, any individuals.

I think, I mean the biggest responsibility, I mean there's two groups that I think you're responsible to: one is your customers, primarily, because I fundamentally believe that customers pay your wages, and then your employees and colleagues ... 

Just coming back to that first group that you mentioned there, customers, what is that responsibility?

Well, to give them what they want. You know, they, customers are very canny people, no matter where they're from, who they are, what sex they are. In my experience customers are very intuitive and your responsibility to them is to give them what they want, when they want it and to anticipate what they're going to want in the future when they don't even know the answer to that, because they know what they want now and they know what they're going to want tomorrow but they haven't got a clue what they're going to want in eighteen months time. And certainly, as a retailer, your job is to try and work out what it is they're going to want in eighteen months time and provide it for them and that's a responsibility.

And you feel that that is a moral duty rather than just a pragmatic duty which contributes to the commercial success of the business?

Well ... it's probably more of the latter than the former. I'm not sure it's a moral, I mean, morally, do I have any responsibility to my customers? It's a difficult, I mean, if I'm not looking after my customers, they're not going to look after me, and therefore the business will suffer. So it could be described as a moral responsibility, but it's also practical, it is also pragmatic, and it's also, you know, financially essential.

Ambiguity about the precise nature of his responsibilities is also apparent in the following exchange with Max:

I'd be interested to know, in your business role, do you feel that you have any specific moral responsibilities to any people or groups?

Moral responsibility? Yes. Clearly. You have – I mean you have responsibility morally for anyone you come into contact with really; so your customers, your staff, your suppliers, your colleagues. Groups that are there to influence your behaviour; pressure groups, I mean you have you know, moral responsibility to all those people I think.
Well, what's the origin of those responsibilities? Why do you think you feel you have a responsibility to those particular groups?

Because most of the people are interfacing with you through your commercial endeavours and are complying with a list of things that you are — are on your agenda and therefore it's important, the responsibility that goes with that, your sort of — your role.

Both Max and Ray, then, seem uncertain about the source of their moral responsibilities. It is not altogether clear whether Ray's sense of responsibility towards customers and employees and Max's sense of responsibility towards "anyone you come into contact with" derives from the affect that their organizations have on these people or from their organizations dependency on them.

Two possible explanations of this apparent ambivalence merit consideration. The first is that these participants are articulating an ethic of reciprocity, which might be paraphrased as "these stakeholders give us something; therefore we have a responsibility to give them something back". However, I think a more plausible explanation, one which is consistent with the general moral valorisation of organizational prosperity that I have already discussed, is that these participants are offering an instrumental normative response to what I intended to be an intrinsic normative question. In other words, my efforts to find out who is intrinsically important to their moral decision making elicited observations about who is instrumentally important to the realisation of their moral objectives. Ray and Max are not articulating an intrinsic normative valorisation of the groups they mention; they are describing instrumental normative responsibilities: they feel a responsibility to look after these people because doing so is consistent with the prosperity of the organization, which helps them to fulfil their intrinsic responsibilities to those who depend upon the organization.

As I pointed out earlier, whether the sense of responsibility these participants articulate is intrinsic normative or instrumental normative does not necessarily detract from or add to its moral worth. In either case, the sense of responsibility ultimately derives from a moral concern. Although Ray's responsibility to his customers accords intrinsic value not to those customers but to those who stand to gain from their support, his is nevertheless an expression of moral responsibility towards that latter group. Likewise, Max's responsibilities towards customers, staff, suppliers and colleagues may not imply intrinsic moral valorisation of those groups. Nevertheless, it implies intrinsic moral regard for someone or something. In both cases, Ray and Max may only valorise the stakeholders they
mention because of their importance to the prosperity of their organizations. But this still implies moral regard for the prosperity of the organization, or beyond that, for those who stand to gain from that prosperity. An instrumental normative understanding of ones responsibilities towards stakeholders is no less morally charged than an intrinsic normative understanding: both are “normative”.

However, as well as further illustrating the intrinsic normative/instrumental normative stakeholding distinction discussed earlier, the present discussion also points towards another important distinction: this time, that between two different notions of intrinsic normative stakeholder. This distinction is between the people who are affected by the activities of the organization, and thus by the decisions of a leader, and those people who depend upon the prosperity of the organization. To illustrate this difference, I will draw again on Jane’s example. Jane, remember, is MD of a family owned cider company. Jane accounts for her responsibility to various stakeholder groups as follows:

It’s not only us, it’s all our employees, all our local farmers. Their main crop now is cider apples. We’re not only looking after us as shareholders, as directors, but we’ve got the employees, we’ve got our suppliers. There’s a huge knock-on effect…. so I need to keep the company sound and that would be looking after everybody that’s involved with the business. So whether it’s a shareholder, whether it’s an employee, whether it’s a supplier or whether it’s a customer.

Jane is focusing here on those stakeholders who depend upon her organization’s ongoing prosperity. This includes the shareholders and creditors who depend on the organization for a return on their capital. She also mentions her employees, who depend on the organization for an income and for all the other benefits associated with employment. Local farmers are also dependent on the organization, for they would have to find another outlet for their apple crop if it went out of business. Other members of the local community also have a dependency relationship with the company: the company is deeply embedded in the local economy; other local businesses, as well those stakeholders who depend upon them, would suffer were Jane’s company to fail. It could even be argued that the retailers and pubs who buy cider from Jane’s company depend, to some extent, on her organization’s survival and prosperity. Although these outlets could source their cider elsewhere in the event of the company’s demise, this would probably entail switching costs on their part.

Jane does not, in this passage, refer to stakeholders who may not have a dependency relationship with her organization but who are nevertheless affected by its activities. For
example, Jane’s company might choose to aggressively market high-alcohol cider to young people. The company might do this because it enhances commercial performance and thus promotes the interests of all those dependent stakeholders mentioned above. However, encouraging teenagers to drink strong cider may incur a range of social and economic costs that would have to be borne by other members of society: those people who may be directly affected by the actions of binge drunk teenagers; or those who may find their own demands for medical and police services delayed because the providers of those services are dealing with the repercussions of teenage drunkenness. All of these people are affected stakeholders. However, they are not dependent in any way on the survival and prosperity of Jane’s business.

The environmental affects of Jane’s business are also potentially significant. She may choose to cut corners in matters such as waste disposal, thus enhancing profitability and protecting the interests of her dependent stakeholders. However, all those other stakeholders who are affected by the consequent environmental degradation would pick up the tab for such ecological inattention.

Now, I am not suggesting for one moment that Jane would sanction such socially or environmentally damaging actions. Indeed, as far as I can tell, her company takes its social and environmental responsibilities far more seriously than do some of its competitors. Nevertheless, to focus uniquely on responsibilities to dependent stakeholders may serve to marginalise, or even obscure, the broader social and environmental consequences of the organization’s activities. Prioritising the categorical moral significance of dependent stakeholders may thus detract attention from the consequences of the organization’s activities for its affected stakeholders.

It is therefore possible to distinguish three different stakeholder groups. The first group is the instrumental normative stakeholders to whom I have already referred: those groups without whose support the company would fail - for example, its customers, suppliers, shareholders and employees. The second group comprises those stakeholders who depend upon the organization’s survival and prosperity: one category of intrinsic normative stakeholder – dare I refer to them by the even more cumbersome title of dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders. Clearly, there is a lot of crossover between these first and second groups: most of the shareholders, employees, suppliers and, to a lesser extent, customers, upon whom a commercial organization depends for its survival (its intrinsic normative stakeholders) also tend to fall into the category of dependent intrinsic normative stakeholder. The third group comprises those people who are affected by the activities that
the organization pursues in seeking to secure its survival and prosperity. I will call these 
affected intrinsic normative stakeholders. Again, there is quite a lot of cross over between 
this and other stakeholder groups. For instance, all of an organization’s dependent intrinsic 
normative stakeholders are likely to also fall into the category of affected intrinsic 
normative stakeholders, since their dependency relationship with the organization entails an 
affect relationship. However, the key point is that there will be some affected intrinsic 
normative stakeholders who are not also dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders. The 
interests of these people will not be included in the moral calculus those leaders who focus 
uniquely on their responsibilities to instrumental normative stakeholders and dependent 
intrinsic normative stakeholders.

It is important, then, to be clear about who we are talking about when we consider our 
moral responsibilities. It is important because, as I pointed out earlier, the precise nature of 
those responsibilities has significant implications. The key point to make from this 
discussion is that different universes of moral relevance are venerated by different 
interpretations of stakeholder responsibilities. When we speak of responsibilities to 
stakeholders, we should be clear about which “stakeholders” we are morally venerating, for 
we are potentially speaking about three different groups of people: those upon whom an 
orGANization depends; those who depend upon it; and those who are otherwise affected by 
it. A highly salient point is that, although there may be some crossover, there are also likely 
to be people who fall into one of these groups but not the others. In particular, there will be 
affected intrinsic normative stakeholders who fall into the categories of neither dependent 
intrinsic normative stakeholder nor instrumental normative stakeholder. By focusing on 
their responsibilities to either dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders or instrumental 
normative stakeholders, leaders may overlook those other people who are affected by their 
actions. And since affect is offered by many participants as a basis for moral responsibility, 
a potential inconsistency in their discourse becomes apparent.

**General observations**

Some general points have emerged from this enquiry into how participants establish the 
moral legitimacy of their organizations’ activities. Several participants reflect on the 
broader social and environmental impact of their organization. Some of these are inclined to 
adopt a strikingly unilateral stance in evaluating the moral desirability of that impact, a 
characteristic that accords with the picture of moral autocracy discussed in the previous two 
chapters. An alternative approach to assessing moral legitimacy is to respond to the moral 
expectations of the community served by the organization; a more democratically-
constituted court of appeal. However, it is important to be clear about the group whose expectations are being responded to by this apparent intersubjective sensitivity: is it those who are affected by the activities of the organization or is it those who influence the prosperity of the organization? If it is those people upon whom the organization depends for its prosperity, we should be clear that this may differ from those people who its activities affect.

In defining the universe of moral relevance, participants tend to focus on the importance of organizational stakeholders, placing particular emphasis on employees. The moral significance accorded to employees is apparent insofar as they are generally cast as the ultimate beneficiaries of moral decision-making and also from the fact that moral dilemmas tend to revolve around detrimental treatment of minority groups of employees. Organizational prosperity is held out as the ultimate indicator of moral legitimacy. This is not because organizational prosperity carries intrinsic moral value; it is because the prosperity of the organization promotes the interests of those stakeholders who depend on it. Most notable amongst these dependent stakeholder groups are the organization's employees.

The importance of stakeholders, and particularly employees, in participants' moral calculus seems to stem from the relationship that exists between the organization and those stakeholders. However, some ambiguity about the precise nature of that relationship is apparent: it is not always clear whether stakeholders are morally significant because they are affected by the actions of the organization, because they are dependent on its prosperity or because they influence that prosperity. This discussion enables the identification of three notions of "stakeholder". Stakeholders may be those upon whom the organization depends for its prosperity (instrumental normative stakeholders); they may be those who stand to benefit from that prosperity (dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders); or they may be those who are affected by the organization's activities (affected intrinsic normative stakeholders). There will be a great deal of crossover between these three groups: a lot of people may fall into more than one group. However, there may be some who only fall into one group.

This tripartite distinction is important for the following reason. The prosperity of the organization is generally the moral trump card that outbids all other considerations in participants' ethical deliberations. This is because the prosperity of the organization is taken as proxy for the interests of those who depend upon it. So the ultimate moral focus is those stakeholders (generally those employees) who stand to gain from the prosperity of the
organization. On the other hand, the reason most often given for leaders' responsibility towards these stakeholders is the affect that the organization has on them and thus the magnitude of the impact of the leader's decisions for them; there is a presupposition that "affect" entails "responsibility for". However, a possible area of tension emerges insofar as those people who are affected by the organization's activities are unlikely to be identical with those who stand to gain from its prosperity. If affect is a criterion for intrinsic moral responsibility, then privileging the rule utilitarian principle of organizational prosperity above all other considerations may cause some morally significant stakeholders to be overlooked by the leader. Given the magnitude of the organizations that some of these participants lead, and the breadth of groups that are likely to be affected by those organizations activities, and thus by those leaders' decisions, this seems to be a very significant omission.

**Tension between Imposition and Agency**

In this section I will consider the second of the two questions that I explored earlier in my discussion of the leadership literature: that is, the extent to which leadership tends to be intrinsically suppressive of the agency of those who are "led". I will outline two different ways that participants evaluate the interests of those who they lead. I will suggest that one of these attitudes amplifies this concern while the other alleviates it to some extent.

I will conclude this empirical report by moving away from the issue of followers' agency and considering that of leaders. To do so, I will return to the people with whom I began the report: those three participants who, to a large extent, exemplify three different ideal type approaches to the evaluation of ethicality. This time, I will discuss how these three articulate contrasting approaches to the question of their own agency, with specific reference to the extent to which they concede culpability for the moral dilemmas that they find themselves having to address.

**Who is to be the judge of personal enhancement?**

In keeping with the valorisation of employees that I have already discussed, participants tend to dwell on the personal satisfaction that they take in being able to release potential in people. Given the moral significance accorded by research participants to their employees, it is unsurprising that they speak of the satisfaction they derive from enabling the personal development of their people. However, a subtle difference is apparent in the manner in which different participants speak about releasing potential. I will illustrate this contrast by
comparing two pairs of narrative. I will begin by presenting discussions with Mark and Patrick, before drawing attention to a common characteristic manifested by these two excerpts. I will then present discussions with Gill and Dennis, reflecting on the way in which these differ from the first pair.

Mark reflects on the personal satisfaction that he derives from seeing people develop, offering an example which illustrates this:

_What would be the things that have given you a great deal of satisfaction in your business career; what sort of thing gives you satisfaction as a leader of business organizations?_

... What gives me most pleasure in it quite apart from results, because results do give me pleasure, is the people, particularly in terms of those who are there when you arrive in a business and who you are able to, through whatever minor skills you may have in this area, develop those people so they can come through the business. To give you a good example when I was first a director with [a major brewery], I was a retail office director in a region of the country running a few hundred managed houses and there was one pub ... the one thing that gave me a lot of pleasure was one of the cleaners there had been cleaning in the pub for years, and of course a great cleaner, very proud of the work she did ... but she had a daughter who also used to do some part-time cleaning and that daughter was really very impressive just in terms of personality. She worked behind the bar then and then she became, over a few years, an area manager and worked up to that and then she became a director and the last I heard of [her] she was actually working for [the brewery] as one of their two major retail directors. Now that is a good example of things that give you a real pleasure in business.

Patrick also describes how important it is to him to develop his people:

_If I could start Patrick by asking you to reflect back on the things that have given you the greatest satisfaction in your business career._

... The things that I was proudest of always was wherever you were you had a good team ... by and large there would be a core of thirty or forty people I’d known when we changed structures, as we did fairly regularly, [so] you at least had some basis of trust with the people ... So I mean I enjoyed it and we did well, we grew the business and we made a lot of profit and we took great pleasure in making profit targets but mainly it’s getting in and having people there for whom you’ve got respect; seeing them.

Patrick revisits this theme a little later:
I'm certainly somebody that liked teams and liked seeing people and the interaction with people. I mean, I'm not saying I was a consensus manager, but it would upset me if I felt people were either in violent disagreement or unhappy or felt that they weren't valued. So at the bottom of what I was trying to do, I always felt that there's far more potential in far more people than we can ever release. I mean we never really do, you know ... I've always believed that, that there's a huge amount of latent talent and I guess what I was always hoping was, if people are well motivated, then they will go that extra step. But whether that was to make the business prosper or whether that's just a belief that I'd have done [that] whether it made the business prosper or not is a different matter and I can't tell you which ...I mean, for some people its almost a calculated way of doing business or indeed making sure that you don't get banged up. And for others there's may be an innate sense and ... it's impossible really for people to decide what their motivations are ...

But the fact that you derived a certain degree of satisfaction from seeing that potential realised in people would suggest that there was something intrinsic about that that was appealing to you?

I think so. I've always been gregarious and I've always wanted to see people do well always at whatever level.

Was this because you felt that in your leadership role you had some responsibility to try and develop that potential?

Yes.

Or was it because it gave you pleasure?

I think I felt there was a responsibility as well as that being my style of management.

A common feature of these accounts is that both Mark and Patrick describe the satisfaction that they derive from facilitating the personal development of their people. Mark describes this as an intrinsic satisfaction: he likes seeing people do well irrespective of the consequences of that success for the business. Patrick is a little more circumspect. Like Mark, he tells of the personal satisfaction that he gets from developing others but he also allows that part of this satisfaction may derive from the consequent enhancement in that person's contribution to the commercial success of the organization. Despite this allowance on Patrick's part, though, it is clear that, like Mark, he derives personal satisfaction from seeing other people develop and from having been able to contribute to that development.
A further common feature is the criteria by which both Mark and Patrick assess personal development. Both evaluate the personal development of their people in accordance with criteria which appeal to them personally. In other words Mark and Patrick tend to refer mainly to their own standards of evaluation in appraising the development of their people. Now, these standards may not be contentious; they may be perfectly in keeping with the standards of evaluation which those employees would use to evaluate their own personal development. Indeed, in these examples, it is unlikely that the individuals described by Mark and Patrick would disagree about the positive nature of the development which Mark and Patrick have facilitated. However, the key point is that neither Mark nor Patrick gives much thought to the possibility that the perspectives of those people may differ from their own. Indeed, Mark offers elsewhere a somewhat more contentious appraisal of the best interests of his employees. Having described his sense of responsibility to do the best for his people, he then adopts a highly paternalistic stance in suggesting that there are times when it may be in an employee’s best interests to show them the door:

I don’t look upon that in any sort of philanthropic way though, it might be your responsibility is to explain to that person that they would really hate it in there in future and therefore their best interests are served being somewhere else.

A subtly different approach from that of Mark and Patrick is apparent in the following two accounts. Firstly, Gill, a former HR director with a major retailing group, tells of the satisfaction that she derives from releasing potential in people.

*Can I ask you what sort of things have given you the most satisfaction in your business career?*

In my business career, the things I have done which have made a positive difference and not just to the organization but to individuals. And, now when I look back I realise that the best impact a person can make is upon other individual people. You can make an impact on an organization, you can make an organization different, you can help an organization to change, but any sort of sustainable difference, any sustainable change, I think, is much more likely and evident at an individual level. And, there’s a great quote actually, or a poem or something, by a guy called Ralph Waldo Emerson and it’s called *Success Is*. And it goes through a number of things and it finishes off with “knowing that one life is breathed easier, that is success”. And that’s a little bit actually where I come from is that, if I’ve made individuals’ lives more easy or better, then actually that’s successful. That’s what I would aim to achieve.
OK. Can you give me any examples of how that is, how you've achieved that within a business context?

Yeah, I mean the role of HR Director is essentially, supposedly, about people and it's possible to make a huge amount of difference to groups of people as an HR Director because in essence what you're trying to do is help those people, this is my view of the HR Director role, is to help those people to create the environment where everybody can be their most productive. So, why do you develop managers? Why do you put performance appraisal processes in place? Why do you help people to develop their behavioural skills and so on? Ultimately, they will only really be effective if there is a climate and the environment that allows them to be like that. ... It is about creating the right environment to allow people to flourish and to deliver their best; to be the most productive. And there are all sorts of systems and processes and mechanisms that the HR function, as the experts, should put in place to allow that to happen ... I think every person actually, manager, leader or any other individual, can help another individual to grow and develop. And I've just said to grow and I sort of resist saying that because it sounds so “brown rice and sandals”, if you know what I mean. But, yeah, any individual can help somebody else be the best that they can be.

... you mention that this is the thing that gives you the greatest satisfaction, creating an environment within which people can flourish and people can develop, is that because you take intrinsic satisfaction from doing that and from the development of people, or is it because you take satisfaction from developing those people to promote the business case?

Hmm. Well I think this answer is quite clear really – in terms of where I am in my career [Gill has left her corporate role to start her own business as a personal trainer] because I think it's probably the former rather than the latter. And I think through the whole time that I was within the corporate environment my satisfaction came from what you could do with people. The rationale for it, the raison d'être, is so that the business can increase its profitability. Making money doesn't do it for me, you know, so then you might argue what on earth are you doing in business? Well, actually because I thought, and I still do believe, that businesses are more successful if they've got a group of people working within them who are at their most productive.

Like Patrick, Gill reflects, when invited to, on the distinction between valuing the development of her people as an intrinsic good and valuing that development insofar as it enhances the performance of the organization. Gill’s suggestion is that, although her focus is on the former, the two are mutually compatible. This distinction between the intrinsic and instrumental value of personal development is peripheral to main point that I wish to make.
here however. The main point is that there is a rather different tone to Gill’s narrative than to those of Mark and Patrick. This difference is articulated most succinctly in her suggestion that “if I’ve made individuals’ lives more easy or better, then actually that’s successful”. This phrase points to the involvement of those people whose potential Gill unlocks in the evaluation of that development; in order for personal development to deliver the satisfaction which Gill describes, those peoples’ lives need to be enhanced on their terms rather than purely on the terms of the leader. Gill thus moves away from the unilateral estimation of people’s enhancement that characterises Mark and Patrick’s narratives. She implies that personal development only counts if it is seen as such by those people whose development is in question. This distinction is illustrated still more explicitly in the following conversation with Dennis:

*What I’d like to begin with Dennis, is just to get some understanding of what are the sort of things that have given you personal satisfaction in your business career?*

To a degree they’ve been really about seeing other people take off, as it happens …

*Can you give me any tangible examples of any particular events that have given you particular satisfaction?*

Early in my career, I think it was successfully leading and running a process that involved substantial operational change and building a good team and helping that happen. I think in my middle career it was seeing people that had felt they couldn’t break through to the levels and perhaps positions they aspired to, to sort of work with them; to find experiences that enabled them to do that. And I am particularly thinking of one occasion where … somebody that led a very old-fashioned work-measurement team converted it completely into a group of people that added enormous value to the operation, into the customer service units and the rest of it. And that was based solely on the key guy having an experience of [a coaching organization], in this particular case, that quite transformed the way he thought about his role and himself. And I bumped into him three months ago, having not seen him for seven years, and he’s still working with the people from [the coaching organization] but now they are working together and it’s a lovely organization now, so it’s a much changed situation. Those kind of things give me a certain kind of pleasure.

*So just looking at that last example, what is it in that situation that you found particularly satisfying?*

I think at the root of it is, it’s a combination of two kinds of things. Firstly the key individuals, building their self-belief and being able to express it in a way they find
meaningful and motivational and fulfilling, and at the same time doing something that lends a value to the team that they work for or people outside the business, people who buy and sell [their services], also find [to be of] value. And I think a further experience of that kind which is later in my corporate career, where we mobilised the entire front-end team of an insurance business to reinvent, over a very short timescale, the proposition to the consumer which involved working differently with each other, breaking some of the rules that they felt existed, resolving those constraints, working completely differently with suppliers ... and showing what they could do as a team of people, which completely transformed our customers’ experience ... Another example of people changing forever on the basis of an experience they had and making change happen and doing things that they believed were right but they felt were constrained by the way they thought the organization wanted them to work.

So there seem to be two threads coming through there. The first is the development of people’s potential, helping people to realise and achieve their potential, and secondly there’s something about the quality of the offering, the actual outcome of the process.

Yes, I think so. The quality of the outcome having two bearings. The first, how it’s measured by the outside world, the recipients, so people might have a view about what they get. But also that the people delivering it thinking that what they’re now doing is right or righter than it was, so there’s a sense in which I now believe that what I deliver, my day job, is now much more fulfilling because I think I now deliver something that I’m proud of, that other people respect and like, whereas before I didn’t.

The subject-centred quality of Dennis’s estimation of desirable change is particularly apparent in his reference to people “making change happen and doing things that they believed were right but they felt were constrained by the way they thought the organization wanted them to work”. It is also explicit in the second of the “two bearings” which he mentions in the last paragraph of this narrative: projecting himself into the changed person’s perspective, he suggests that “there’s a sense in which I now believe that what I deliver, my day job, is now much more fulfilling because I think I now deliver something that I’m proud of, that other people respect and like, whereas before I didn’t”.

The distinction that I have made in this discussion seems significant to the issue of the suppression of agency. If leaders use their influencing skills to bring about changes in people that are valued by those people, then the potential for suppression of agency is at least diminished. On the other hand, if the sole arbiter of the desirability of change in people is the leader, who also happens to wield exceptional influence over those people, then the threat of suppressed agency looms larger. It is understandable that leaders will wish
to enhance people's contribution to the performance of the organization and that they may use this contribution as a yardstick to appraise and evaluate people's personal development. As Patrick mentions, it is not always easy to separate this motivation from a categorical care for the personal development of the individual. Neither, as Gill suggests, need the two imperatives conflict. But if some attention is also paid to the individual's opinion of what constitutes desirable personal change, then a more genuine harmonisation of individual with organization seems likely.

**Contrasting responses to the contribution of the leader in bringing about dilemmas**

Having discussed the agency of followers, I will now give some consideration to a separate, although not unrelated subject: the agency of leaders and the extent to which different individuals avow or disavow that agency. In order to illustrate this distinction, I will draw again on the three research participants whose perspectives I described in my first section. Remember that David was described as the Company Man who faithfully orients his moral compass in accordance with the values of the organization; James is the Moral Crusader who unflinchingly privileges his own apprehension of moral probity; Roger is the Mediator of Communication who encourages and responds to intersubjective processes.

I will describe here how the discourses of David and James indicate one way of thinking about the leader's agency and how Roger articulates an alternative way. Interestingly, these different ways of thinking about their own agency gainsay, in some respects, the ideal type caricatures that emerged in my earlier discussion. I will discuss this apparent contradiction in a little more detail once I have presented the contrasting perspectives.

I will illustrate the difference between the two approaches by drawing once more on the issue of redundancy that features so prominently in participants' moral deliberations. David identifies redundancy decisions as the most morally challenging situations he faces as a leader:

*Can you think of any situations where that feeling of responsibility for those people has conflicted with what is expected of you as the person who is in charge of this organization?*

Oh many I guess. I guess if you are going through a rationalisation programme where you may have to make people redundant; that hurts. That hurts.

*Ok, so how do you come to terms with that?*
I don't think you do. If I am really honest I don't think you do. I mean you try and blank it out, but it's painful.

*But presumably you morally justify that.*

I think from my point of view; one is you know you have to give a return. So, you know, it sounds callous but, you know, do you sacrifice a hundred to save the thousand? And sometimes you've got to make those decisions to be honest. It's no different from when you are in the army, I guess, making those decisions. But sometimes if we've got a business that's dragging the whole down, you know, do you get rid of that business in order to make sure the whole is ok?

James also identifies redundancy as presenting his greatest moral challenge:

*Can you think back to any particularly dilemmatic situations? Any particular moral dilemmas that you have had to deal with in a leadership role that you would be comfortable telling me about?*

I suppose the sort of examples that immediately spring to mind where I am always most uncomfortable is when you have to make people redundant.

*Ok. Why is that particularly uncomfortable?*

Because you know what it is doing to the person. ... And it's hard, you know, because if you think, where it's hard and where it's relevant to your question, is where it potentially is a marginal decision. Sometimes it is really clear cut: you just say “look those roles don't exist; most people are going to go”. Other times you have really got to try and hit your budget. You have really got to try and make sure that you are running as efficient as possible but there is somebody that you quite like, they are doing a sort of comfortable job, they are not going to change the world but they have been there for years and it's a comfortable environment and when you go into a company there is always those people around. And some of them you keep because you value the knowledge that they have got and you put them into industry relations or industry affairs or something like that, you know the sort of thing I mean? And there are others who you say, “well actually we can't afford to carry you anymore”. But you know that they are so committed to the company. They love it and their social world is around it and they have got a family with children and they might be approaching an age where they are ten years from retirement but if you make them redundant now they are going to struggle finding another job. What do you do? And at the end of the day you have to do what is right for the business. That is the dilemma. Because
you are paid ... you at the end of the day are paid by the shareholders to do what is right for
the business and if it's the right thing for the business, however much you would like to go
with the comfortable route, you have got to do what is right and you have got to lose them.

Now in previous lives I can think of examples where I have compromised in lots of those
situations and I have compromised probably on more things than I would ever compromise
on now simply because you only get one chance to get it right and so you, you know,
you've got to be decisive, that's what you are paid for. But that's classic dilemma and that's
probably the worst dilemmas are when, you know, you sit down and have a conversation
with the person and however generous you are with the package, however kind you are, you
know what you have done to their lives and that’s really hard.

A common feature of both of the above accounts is that the need for redundancy is
something which David and James depict as being beyond their control. In both cases, they,
as the leaders, regard it as their unpleasant task to do what has to be done. Neither David
nor James is inclined to dwell on the possibility that he might have averted the need for
redundancy or even that he, as a leader, may have contributed in some way to its necessity.
The redundancy scenario is, for both, a done deal; the only personal participation that they
envisage is its enforcement. A somewhat different approach is apparent in the following
description from Roger.

And I think it's one of the, you know, it's probably one of the greatest challenges in
leadership is those difficult situation you face when you have to balance the interests of the
individual against the interest of the organization. And where ultimately you know the right
answer must be that it's the organization that must triumph in those circumstances ... There
is always a sense of failure I think in those situations where you find yourself in a situation
of having to take a decision against an individual in the interests of the organization. And
the first question I tend to ask myself in those circumstances is "how did I create this
problem? What role did I have in creating this?" Because you can't always believe that the
individual or the organization has created it, because you know sometimes it's leadership
that creates those situations ...

Could you give me any examples, which you would be comfortable to give, of that tension
between the interests of the individual and the interests of the organization? Is there
anything that -?

Oh yes some of the, you know, some of the best people that we employ as an organization
and who challenge the organization most effectively and therefore enable the organization
to change, are the very people who have a tendency sometimes to go too far ... And when
the organization has run out of steam with them, because actually you need [such people sometimes] ... actually lots of organizations require people who provide the grit to make them change and sometimes they provide too much grit and as a result they fail and have to move on. Sometimes you do that comfortably and people make progress; you recognise that their contribution to the organization is part of that process. Sometimes you are not able to do that. So those are the hard situations I think; around individuals who you actually know made a significant contribution to shifting the organization on, that have gone so far out of kilter with too much of the organization and you actually have to say “what you have done has been really valuable to us, but actually we can’t use this particular style for too much longer”. I’m sure it happens all over.

So in that sort of situation; what are the principles there? What are the moral principles that are causing you discomfort?

The principles are the conflict between exercising leadership in a way that allows the organization to move on, recognising that the organization is benefiting from it ... and probably not stepping in soon enough to say to the individual “if you are going to carry on this course, exhibiting these characteristics, you will continue to shift the organization, but actually you will run yourself in to a position where your employment can no longer be sustained”.

Like David and James, Roger describes a scenario where individual jobs must be sacrificed in the interests of organizational prosperity. Like them, he regards such situations as highly dilemmatic and, as they do, he proposes that, in such situations, the organization must take precedence over the individual. The difference, however, lies in Roger’s response to these scenarios. For David and James, the redundancy decision is not only a done deal; it is presented as the inescapable resolution to a predicament for which they eschew personal accountability. David and James present such situations as inevitable; they do not dwell on the possibility that they may have contributed to their creation. Roger, on the other hand, is inclined to reflect on the role that he may have played in bringing about such predicaments; to consider what he might have done to avoid the need for redundancy and to learn from the experience:

What role did I have in creating this? Because you can’t always believe that the individual or the organization has created it, because you know sometimes it’s leadership that creates those situations.... it is important to try and sort out why it’s arisen and you don’t learn if you don’t sort it out.
Now this difference in response might be explained by Roger's longevity in his role (ten years). James's more transitory career path is likely to have presented him with inefficiencies that were not of his making but which he has had to resolve. Furthermore, the acquisition context with which both David and James are familiar is likely to have placed demands on them to rectify perceived inefficiencies to which they have not contributed. Nevertheless, despite this possible explanation for these contrasting responses, the reflective tone of Roger's response offers a model of personal accountability that seems to be morally significant.

A final point concerns the extent to which these different avowals of agentic responsibility contrasts with the ideal type characterisations that I attributed earlier to David, James and Roger. In David's case, dissolution of his own agency in the face of corporate strategy is perhaps understandable given his eagerness to harmonise his own agenda with that of the organization. In James's case, though, it is surprising that he does not dwell on his own contribution to the situation whose resolution he describes. This seems to conflict with the willingness that he demonstrates elsewhere to take ownership for what happens in his organization. In Roger's case, his willingness to reflect on the part that he has played in bringing about the need for redundancy indicates a degree of personal authorship that may be at odds with his generally consultative mien.

Perhaps, in these cases, contextual circumstances are more elucidative of these differences in approach than are the inherent characteristics of the respective leaders. The transient nature of James's career to date and his relatively recent appointment to his present role might account for his uncharacteristic abrogation of ownership. On the other hand, Roger's ten year tenure in his present role, and the similarly lengthy stays that have characterised his previous leadership appointments, may have encouraged responsibility for and ownership of the unpleasant situations that he has had to resolve. If this is so, then perhaps it says something important about the moral desirability of transient leadership appointments: if leaders change so frequently that each spends their time mopping up the moral spillage of their predecessors, then ethically sensitive behaviour seems less likely. On the other hand, if leaders hang around long enough to confront the moral downsides of their own leadership actions, rather than moving swiftly on to their next leadership challenge and leaving a successor to pick up the pieces of their present actions, then they may be more sensitive to the potential moral repercussions of those actions.
General observations

As far as agency is concerned, then, I have made two distinctions. The first is to contrast leader-centred and subject-centred perspectives to the evaluation of personal change in people. I have suggested that a subject-centred perspective diminishes the threat that paternalistically-inclined leadership agendas present to the agency of followers. I have also distinguished between those leaders who are inclined to overlook their own contribution to moral dilemmas and those who acknowledge it and learn from it. I have suggested that the occurrence of such dilemmas may be reduced if leaders pay greater attention to the part that they may have played in bringing them about. I have also proposed that leaders may be more inclined to acknowledge their own agentic responsibilities if they remain in leadership roles long enough to confront the morally troubling consequences of their earlier decisions. In this respect, length of tenure is likely to generate a longer-term moral perspective than transient leadership careers.
6.0 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I propose to pull together a number of strands from my theoretical and empirical research in order to develop a normative model of ethical leadership. Before doing so, I will summarize these preceding sections, highlighting some key points that have emerged so far.

The review of the leadership literature with which this thesis began looked at two potential areas of moral concern about leadership: that leadership may be applied to bring about goals that are morally undesirable; and the possibility that leadership may be inherently suppressive of the agency of so-called followers. As far as the first of these issues is concerned, many theorists assume that, as long as leaders are not egotistically motivated, then they will lead towards morally legitimate outcomes. However, in placing such faith in altruism, these commentators confront another moral hazard: that of narrowly defined altruism. There is a danger that, in according primacy to the interests and agendas of their so-called followers, leaders will lose sight of the wider repercussions of their and their organization’s actions.

One response to the second challenge, leadership’s potential to erode the agency of followers, is to point to the congruence between effective leadership and sensitivity to followers’ needs. If it is the case that, in order to be effective, leaders must respond to followers’ needs, then the challenge to agency at least seems to be diminished. However, a shadow is cast over the ethically legitimising force of leaders’ responsiveness to followers’ needs if it is driven by expediency rather than by sincere care. Furthermore, in championing the needs of employees, the emphasis that some theorists place on the collective may pose a threat to those groups or individuals whose profiles, aspirations or interests differ in some way from those of the majority.

The responses that commentators offer, either explicitly or tacitly, to these moral challenges can be classified according to the extent to which they are congruent with either a managerialist or a critical perspective. Those stances that reveal a managerialist commitment tend to place considerable onus on the leader as arbiter of moral probity. They also reveal a characteristically unitarist understanding of peoples agendas. On the other hand, critically tinged accounts are more open to the possibility of diverse agendas and also allow more space for contributions from multiple perspectives in defining moral probity. I concluded my discussion of the leadership literature by suggesting that managerially-oriented and critically-inclined accounts may present rather different challenges: that the
former may perhaps be harder to justify from an ethical point of view while the latter may present greater practical difficulties of application within contemporary organizational contexts.

Having considered ethics through the lens of the leadership literature, I then went on to consider leadership from a range of ethical perspectives. My review of the ethics literature was divided into three sections, each section relating to a different meta-ethical orientation. My discussion of principle-based ethics briefly described some prominent theories and explored their implications for leadership. On the subject of utilitarianism, I drew attention to a number of conceptual and practical difficulties of application that it presents, highlighting rule utilitarianism as a possible solution to some of the latter. I pointed out how social contract theory offers a highly contestable basis for organizational ethics, given the likelihood of asymmetrical bargaining positions from which any hypothetical, original position may be presumed. I proposed that Kant’s principle of universalisation and his principle of ends may offer some useful insights to leadership ethics in contemporary organizational contexts. However, I also suggested that Kant’s preclusion of charitable emotions from ethical arbitration, or at least their relegation to a lesser status than rationally specified duty, seems rather harsh. I briefly mentioned how John Rawls’ theory of justice, in drawing selectively from social contract theory and Kantian theory, may avoid some of the difficulties associated with each.

I concluded my discussion of principle-based ethics with some general observations. The first is that, although principle-based theory seems to hold out the promise of straightforward principles of moral legitimation, the actual application of those principles is a highly complex matter, involving many practical and theoretical challenges. As such, to expect leaders to single-handedly shoulder the burden of principle-based legitimation on behalf of organizations would be to ask an awful lot of them. I went on to observe that the multiplicity and complexity of principle-based theory renders it prone to co-optation by leaders who seek a convenient ethical rationale to justify whatever actions they may choose on non-moral grounds. I proposed that, to avoid charges of expedient co-optation, it seems reasonable to expect leaders to apply their chosen principle-based approach with a degree of consistency. My discussion of principle-based ethics ended by considering the charge that it fails to account for the way that people actually approach moral decision making: that we do not tend to think about ethical dilemmas in terms of principles. Even if we accept these criticisms, I suggested that principle-based theory may still have something to offer to ethical evaluation of leadership. Firstly, by theorising about straightforward ethical scenarios in terms of principles, we might be able to derive guidelines that will help us to
resolve more complex dilemmas. Secondly, considering moral dilemmas from the perspectives of a range of principle-based theories may draw attention to salient aspects of those dilemmas that we would otherwise have overlooked. As such, principle-based ethics offers, at the very least, a useful aid to moral reflection about leadership.

My second ethics chapter discussed existentialism. In briefly reviewing the philosophy of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, I highlighted some common themes and also some significant points upon which these writers differ. A common ingredient of existentialist theory is its repudiation of universal, objective standards of evaluation. I suggested that Nietzschean ethics offers the basis for a highly elitist style of leadership that is not constrained by conventional moral standards. Other existentialist commentators emphasise the importance of an authentic way of life; one which acknowledges and responds to the autonomy of the human condition. Heidegger and Sartre consider a range of factors that may impede an authentic lifestyle. Chief amongst these is the apparent dependency of our choices on our contextual circumstances and upon those around us. Against this apparent determinism, existentialism emphasises that we are always free to choose. So, although it is important to acknowledge that our choices are, to some extent, influenced by our circumstances, we must not lose sight of our ineluctable autonomy. This goes for leaders as much as anyone else. Despite circumstances that may seem to impede and limit leaders’ choices, they are always free to decide how they respond to those circumstances. So while existentialism undermines the notion of universal, objective standards of rightness and places the onus of moral choice fairly and squarely on the leader, it also permits leaders no hiding place from their moral commitments.

A further important issue for existentialism, to which different philosophers offer contrasting responses, relates to the authenticity of other people. On the one hand, Sartre’s early work draws attention to the conflictual quality of intersubjective encounters, proposing that one person’s authenticity can only be sustained by eroding that of other people. So, applying this understanding to leadership, leaders’ authenticity necessarily challenges that of their followers. On the other hand, Heidegger holds out the prospect of mutually authentic co-existence. Heidegger’s analysis of intersubjectivity thus offers the basis for a leadership relationship in which leaders sustain their own authenticity whilst also facilitating that of their followers.

The third and last of my ethics chapters discussed intersubjectivity in greater detail, focusing in particular on the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. It began by considering some similarities between Habermasian theory and Aristotelian and virtue ethical perspectives:
that ethical probity does not derive from either congruence with external standards or from individual commitment but that it derives from the quality of the communicative processes by which decisions are made. I went on to outline how, given the inescapably social nature of human existence, and the criticality of communication to social existence, Habermas places communication at the heart of ethics. I then described some rules of communicative legitimisation that Habermas derives from his transcendental-pragmatic analysis of communication.

In drawing out the implications of Habermas’s intersubjectivist ethics for leadership, particularly his focus on critical reflection and on raising and challenging validity claims, I pointed to the role it presents for leaders as facilitators of communicative action in organizations. I also drew attention to some difficulties that this depiction might present: that certain forms of rational articulation might be privileged over others; that leaders’ status might act as a barrier to communicative action; that leaders may have to audit their own communicative fealty in a never ending succession of intersubjective fora; that, given the difficulties of achieving consensus, leaders may feel inclined to manipulate and enforce in order to generate apparent consensus. In particular, I outlined the challenges that delinguistified steering media such as power and money might present to communicative action; a matter that is of particular relevance to organizational leadership ethics within a capitalist economy. I suggested that, despite these difficulties, the processual model of moral legitimation offered by Habermas may nevertheless offer a workable, moral orientation point to leaders.

The next section discussed my empirical research. After outlining the empirical method that I adopted in my discussions with practising leaders I presented the findings of these discussions over three chapters. The first chapter described some ideal type ways of thinking about morality and leadership, drawing upon the discourses of three particular participants to highlight characteristics associated with each ideal type. For the Company Man ideal type, his company’s moral sensitisation assures the moral legitimacy of its agenda. Consistent application of that agenda therefore takes moral primacy for him. Morality is presented as a fairly straightforward matter, so the Company Man sees no need for ethical soul searching. As long as he enforces his organization’s moral code, he will be leading morally. The Moral Crusader ideal type also presents morality as a fairly straightforward matter. However, for him, it is his own infallible moral judgement that assures probity. The Moral Crusader is characterised by his moral self-assurance. He is confident in his own perspicacity and shows no reticence in acting as moral judge and jury for his organization. Given that standards of moral probity are self-evident to the Moral.
Crusader, the only possible inhibition to moral leadership is unwillingness to apply those standards. The Moral Crusader shows no such reticence. Notably, neither the Company Man nor the Moral Crusader see much need to involve other people in shaping moral codes.

The Mediator of Communication ideal type differs from both the Company Man and the Moral Crusader in several ways. For the former, apprehension of moral probity is a less straightforward matter, so there is ground for tension between personal and organizational values. Whereas the Company Man trusts in the moral code handed down by global head office and the Moral Crusader privileges his own moral judgement, the Mediator of Communication is inclined to consult around ethics. Although he believes that leaders have a role in shaping and sustaining organizational values, he presents this role within a framework of participation. In considering tensions between his role as leader and as a participant in consultation, he focuses on his part in encouraging and informing other peoples’ critical reflection.

In reflecting on these ideal types, I pointed out that the contrasts between those three people who I chose to illustrate them may be partly shaped by their respective organizational contexts. However, I also suggested that this need not necessarily preclude the applicability to alternative contexts of these ways of thinking about the morality of organizational leadership. I also noted some congruence with, and also some differences between, each of these ideal types and the meta-ethical approaches reviewed in my ethics literature chapters. I noted that the Company Man, Moral Crusader and Mediator of Communication evoke, and also depart in some respects from, principle-based, existentialist and intersubjective ways of thinking about leadership ethics.

The next chapter pursued this tripartite schema of ideal types by drawing on my other discussions to further illuminate these ideal type understandings. It did so whilst exploring a particular tension associated with the practical application of each different meta-ethical understanding to organizational leadership. In further elaborating upon the Company Man ideal type I focused on the issue of consistency. I pointed out that a number of research participants consider it their duty to consistently apply principle but that they often find this very challenging on an emotional level. In considering further the Moral Crusader ideal type, I explored some contrasting responses to the issue of authenticity. I noted the challenge that pressures to conform might present to leaders’ fealty to their own moral commitments. I also noted that while most research participants were inclined to privilege their own authenticity, a few mentioned the need to also enable authenticity in others. As far as the Mediator of Communication is concerned, I explored conflicting pressures on
leaders, on the one hand, to facilitate an exchange of diverse perspectives and, on the other hand, to seek reassurance in a supportive community of thought. I noted that, amongst my research participants, the latter is more common than the former.

In third and final chapter of my empirical report, I described some insights that my research discussions enabled to the two questions discussed in my earlier review of the leadership literature: the ethicality of leadership goals and the potential for leadership to undermine followers’ agency. I noted an overwhelming tendency to uphold the prosperity and survival of the organization as a moral imperative. Rather than being presented as a categorical good though, this imperative was generally privileged insofar as upholds the interests of a particular universe of moral relevance, which I described as “dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders”. Of greatest significance in research participants’ moral calculi are their employees, to whom they report a particular affiliation. I noted, however, a possible tension between, on the one hand, participants’ preoccupation with dependent stakeholders and, on the other hand, a tendency to present affect, rather than dependency, as a basis for inclusion in their universe of moral relevance.

As far as the issue of suppressed agency is concerned, I remarked upon participants’ tendency to speak about the importance of developing their people. However, I also noted that some evaluate employee development in their own terms while others adopt a more dialogical approach to evaluation. I observed contrasting responses on the part of research participants to the issue of their own agency: while some seem to view the moral dilemmas that they encounter as inevitable, others are inclined to reflect on the part that they may have played in bringing these dilemmas about.

Once again, then, my intention in this chapter is to pull together these strands in order to develop a normative model of ethical leadership. In doing so, I will borrow selectively from the philosophical method of G.W.F. Hegel. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977 [1807]), Hegel proposes and implements a particular approach the development of a normative ethic. This approach is premised upon two observations: the first is that most well-considered and thoughtfully presented perspectives have something valuable to offer. Therefore, rather than dismissing ideas out of hand because they do not absolutely provide the final truth that we seek, we should try to build upon those insights that they enable. The second observation is that consideration of the implications of various perspectives will draw attention to potential areas of contradiction and inconsistency within them. The secret to moving forward, then, according to Hegel, is to retain the kernel of moral truth that resides within
each perspective whilst avoiding the contradictions and inconsistencies to which it might be prone.

Hegel believed that by following this method, he could move towards a systematic and utopian vision of moral truth. Furthermore, he believed that his own philosophy approximated to the fulfilment of that process. Now, I make no similar claim, either in relation to the possibility of a systematic utopian truth or in relation to my own ethical ramblings. However, I do agree with Hegel that, by considering some key themes that have emerged through my theoretical and empirical research, it is possible to identify some important insights into what ethical leadership might consist of. I also agree that, by drawing out some of the implications of these ideas, particularly when expressed in their more extreme forms, it is possible to identify some significant difficulties that they present. This, then, is what I will try to achieve in this concluding chapter.

Having thus elaborated on a number of themes, highlighting the merits and drawing attention to some of the corresponding pitfalls of each, I will propose an approach to leadership which, I believe, is most likely to retain the former whilst avoiding the latter. I will finish with some reflections on the practical feasibility of this normative model of ethical leadership in contemporary work organizations.

The model of ethical leadership that I present here is inevitably a personal one. In describing moral leadership, I do not aver an objectivist meta-ethic. I appreciate that other people who base their ethical judgements on different fundamental presuppositions may not share my conclusions. However, in each of the preceding three sections - the leadership literature review, the ethics literature review and the empirical report - I have sought to draw out the implications of different ways of thinking about leadership, about morality and about the relationship between them. I thus expect to draw attention to and illuminate tensions which may infuse those patterns of thought. Therefore, I hope my conclusion will assist reflection on the relationship between morality and leadership even amongst those whose presuppositions differ from my own.

**Moral Sensitisation as a Guarantor of Moral Leadership**

Many commentators speak of the amoralisation of work organizations. Drawing on Weber's (1968 [1911-1920] description of a rationalisation process that defines late modernity, they note the tendency for the business environment to be perceived by those who work within it, and particularly by those who take on its more influential, leadership
roles, as a context in which measures of effectiveness do and should dominate. Alasdair MacIntyre, commenting on the pervasive influence of managers in the contemporary scene, notes their tendency to “conceive of themselves as morally neutral characters whose skills enable them to achieve the most efficient means of achieving whatever end is proposed” (1984 [1981]: 74). In such an effectiveness-driven culture, there is little space for consideration of the moral desirability of either the ends towards which that effectiveness is directed or the consequences of its single-minded application. Meanwhile, Zygmunt Bauman (1993) refers to the “adiaphorisation” of social organization; a process in which distancing agents from the consequences of their actions and minimising ownership of outcomes through strict functional compartmentalisation leads to a numbing of the moral impulse. Tom Sorrell echoes this theme when he speaks of the “alienation problem”; an apparently unbridgeable divide between ethicists and business practitioners in which the pronouncements of the former can seem “self-righteous and utopian” (1998: 17) to the latter. James Hine (2007) likewise observes that participation in corporate bureaucracies encourages amongst senior managers an overriding commitment to shareholder value which suppresses any broader normative considerations; a fidelity that is further enjoined by its congruence with career and livelihood responsibilities.

The tone of a great deal of the leadership literature reinforces this view of organizations as morality-free zones. Leadership commentators tend to present leadership as an instrumental tool to be applied in the interests of objectives defined by the leader. As I have already noted, they pay little attention to the moral worth of those objectives or to the ethical desirability of the means adopted to achieve them. As well as manifesting the amoral understanding of organizational life to which the likes of MacIntyre and Bauman allude, this disinclination to dwell on leadership’s moral dimension might also serve to perpetuate that understanding.

Contrary to this gloomy Weberian picture, my own discussions with organizational leaders offer grounds for optimism. The people who participated in my research do not tend to prostrate themselves before the altar of effectiveness. Each articulated varying degrees of interest in morality and all considered it to be relevant to their leadership duties. They do not tend to think of leadership as a purely instrumental undertaking that is devoid of moral relevance. All were ready to reflect on the ethical quality of the goals towards which they lead, on the repercussions of achieving those goals or on both.

Of course, this may not be indicative of the attitude of organizational leaders in general, for this is not necessarily a representative group. All of these participants explicitly agreed to
participate in discussions about morality so one might expect them to have some interest in the subject. For each of these morally sensitized leaders, there may well be many others who would see little point in talking about organizational leadership ethics. Nevertheless, that these people participated in my research with a degree of enthusiasm suggests that there is at least some space in organizational life for ethical discourse.

At least in one sense, therefore, all of the people who I met might be called moral leaders: each articulates concern for leadership’s moral dimension and each professes to embrace ethical considerations in carrying out his or her leadership role. Whatever thoughts a reader might have about the precise content of their moral commitments, these leaders declare their reverence for ethics and speak of its importance to their decision-making. Therefore, through the influence that each wields in his or her respective leadership context, he or she might be expected to raise the profile of organizational life’s moral dimension.

However, while it is encouraging to know that at least some people who occupy influential leadership roles consider morality to be relevant to “doing” organizational leadership, some contentious points emerge from their discourses. One particular problem concerns the reassurance that some of these people take from moral sensitisation; either from their own moral sensitisation or from that of the organizations for which they work. In such cases, there is a tacit assumption that moral sensitisation ensures moral conduct. If leaders care enough about ethics to include moral considerations in their decision-making, it is assumed that that decision-making will be ethically correct. Similarly, if the moral dimension of organizational life is accorded a sufficiently high profile, then it is assumed that that organization will conduct itself in a morally correct manner. As long as leaders and organizations care about ethics, it is assumed that they will be ethical.

This faith in the uplifting power of moral sensitisation is premised upon a belief that the apprehension of moral rectitude is a straightforward matter: that we all know what is right and wrong; it is just that some of us choose to do what is right while others choose not to. And since we all know what is moral, as long as leaders and organizations care about the moral quality of their actions, that moral quality will be assured. If they conform to these self-evident standards of moral probity, they will necessarily act in an ethically sound manner.

29 I accessed research participants either through direct approach to people with whom I had previously had no contact (five people), through personal acquaintance (two people) or through referral (nine people). Of my direct approaches, three other people turned me down. These were the only two personal acquaintances that I approached. I do not know how many referrals declined to meet me.
Such is the basis of the moral self-assurance of the Moral Crusader ideal type that is exemplified, in particular, by James. I have characterised Moral Crusaders by their existentially authentic, although they could equally be perceived as self-acclaimed moral sages who credit themselves with an unerring vision of universal principles of right and wrong. Whichever is the case, they are committed to pursuing the moral agenda that is so clearly apparent to them. They see little need to corroborate their personal moral acuity. They perceive their leadership role as being to build organizational commitment to that moral agenda; they are unlikely to devote time to critical reflection on its content. Theirs is a top-down recipe for organizational morality. For them, moral leadership is all about ensuring that the strategic objectives of the organization, and the tactics chosen to achieve those objectives, are shaped by the standards of right and wrong that are so clearly apparent to them, the leaders.

The Company Man ideal type, personified by David, is no less certain of the moral furrow that he ploughs. But whereas Moral Crusaders find moral certitude in the infallibility of their own judgement, the Company Man trusts in the wisdom of the corporation's moral lawmakers. So confident is he in the quality of the tablets of stone that are passed out from Global Head Office that he is happy to measure the ethicality of his own leadership decision-making in accordance with them. The Company Man, like the Moral Crusader, sees little need for critical reflection on the substance of those values and wastes no time debating the company's moral stance. That Head Office cares about ethics, and that it cares enough for ethics to shape organizational policy, is enough to ensure the ethical quality of leadership behaviour that is consistent with corporate values.

Now, to find Moral Crusaders in organizational leadership roles, willing to challenge the status-quo and even, on occasions, to commit career seppuku by throwing themselves on their moral swords offers a welcome antidote to Weberian visions of a morally torpid organizational world. Similarly, for values to be accorded the primacy reported by the Company Man, so that they shape senior manager recruitment, acquisition strategy and choice of markets is, again, contrary to the characterisation of organizations as shrines to bureaucratic efficiency. This suggests that "delinguistified steering media" may not, as Habermas (1984 [1981; 1987 [1981]) warns, have completely overstepped their role as mediators of communicative action; it indicates that money and power may not yet have concluded their colonisation of the lifeworlds of organizational players. And were the apprehension of right and wrong as straightforward as is suggested by the discourses of James, David and suchlike, then it would be easy to share their trust in the morally uplifting
force of moral sensitisation. However, things are not that simple. The occurrence of personal moral dilemmas and interpersonal moral disagreements, as well as the failure of over two-thousand-years of moral philosophy to identify commonly agreed criteria of right and wrong, testify to the complex, nuanced and contested nature of moral judgement. Therefore, to assume that a leader’s or a company’s preoccupation with morality is sufficient to ensure moral probity seems overly optimistic. What is more probable is that the version of moral probity favoured by the leader or by the company’s key influencers will prevail over rival versions.

So, while it is encouraging to find morality treated with such reverence by some leaders in large organizations, and while it is good to know that those organizations offer fertile ground for a preoccupation with ethics, this only takes us some of the way towards reassurance of the moral quality of organizational leadership. There is more than one aspect to moral leadership: that leaders care enough, and that they are allowed to care enough, about ethics for it to impact on their decision-making is of fundamental importance. But that care needs to be augmented by some acknowledgement that moral judgement is not, and never will be, a simple affair and that the manner in which morally charged decisions are reached ought to reflect their complexity.

The Morally Legitimating Force of Consistency

A preoccupation with consistency emerges from my discussions with practising leaders. Most make some mention of the need to behave in a consistent manner; that is, to treat different people similarly and to apply similar standards at different times. This is articulated most vociferously by David, the Company Man, who regards consistent application of corporate values as having fundamental importance. Meanwhile, Mark is so concerned to consistently apply moral principles that he forsakes prudence and also disregards the advice of more senior colleagues in order to do so. Consistency is also apposite to Max’s commendation of congruence between rhetoric and reality and to Ray’s disapproval of allowing long standing, historical relationships to interfere with what he considers to be a fair and transparent tender process.

Consistency is also important to principle-based ethical theory. It is accorded particular significance in Kantian ethics. Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative (1997 [1788; 1948 [1797])] - that we should only act upon those maxims that we would wish to become universalised - offers a simple and straightforward expression of the legitimating force of treating all people, including ourselves, in a consistent manner. More generally,
consistency is an important ingredient to the application of principle-based ethics if it is to avoid the charge of expedient flexibility. Such is the range of consequentialist and deontological theory, and so many are the directions in which different interpretations and applications of any one of them can lead, that the least we can expect from anyone measuring their own conduct in accordance with principle-based ethics is consistency of application and interpretation.

This emphasis on consistency is intuitively appealing. It seems reasonable to expect people in positions of power to dispense that power in an impartial and disinterested manner. For leaders to treat some people differently from others seems wrong. And for them to apply different standards at different times according to arbitrary preference also seems morally problematic. In particular, it would seem unreasonable for leaders to leverage their influence in order to privilege their own interests, or those of close colleagues, at the expense of others. For this reason transformational and charismatic leadership theorists’ reliance on altruism as an indicator of moral probity has quite a lot going for it. The villains of the charismatic and transformational leadership world are those who make of themselves a special case; the heroes are those who use their exceptional talents impartially in the common interest. This, despite its limitations, seems to offer at least a basis for moral legitimation.

However, measuring the ethicality of leadership in terms of consistent application of principle is not without difficulties. A notable challenge is that consistency is always a contestable attribution (Toulmin, 1990); that what looks like consistent treatment to one person may not look so to another. The consistent application of principle demands that relevant similarities in various scenarios are identified and responded to. Of course, no two scenarios are identical; all have differences and similarities. The key to consistent treatment is to identify those dimensions upon which similarity or dissimilarity is relevant to a particular decision. However, to make such assessments of relevance is to take a stance; such assessments require judgements concerning which of a range of similarities matter; which are germane to a particular decision and so call for equal treatment. And just as importantly, it requires judgements concerning those differences between scenarios that are germane to a decision and which thus justify contrasting treatment.

Consider, for a moment, Ray’s disquiet at having been asked by a previous chairman to show favour, in a tender process, to a supplier who had supported the organization through its early days. To Ray, this constitutes unfair favouritism. It contravenes his wish to treat all parties consistently. The choice of supplier, according to Ray, should have been made
purely upon considerations of price, quality and service. All tenders should have been evaluated consistently against those criteria. But this is only Ray’s version of consistency. Another person may have argued, as perhaps did Ray’s chairman, that all stakeholders with whom the organization had enjoyed mutually supportive historical relationships ought to be allowed some latitude in supplier negotiations. This, like Ray’s outlook, seems to offer a basis for consistent treatment. But whereas Ray focuses on particular dimensions of sameness in making his evaluation of consistent treatment, this latter principle responds to an alternative dimension of sameness. I am not suggesting that this second way of looking at Ray’s situation is more morally sound than Ray’s evaluation. I am just using this example to demonstrate that both Ray and his chairman might be judged to have been championing consistent treatment, albeit with reference to contrasting notions of consistency. The important point is that choice of dimensions against which consistency is assessed is premised upon a prior value judgement; a value judgement upon which, in this case, Ray and his chairman seem to have disagreed.

This is an inevitable and unavoidable aspect of consistent application of principle. It need not undermine the desirability of consistency, particularly as a foil to the expedient flexibility to which the co-optation of principle-based ethics might be prone. However, if the notion of consistency is to fulfil its legitimising function, the contestable nature of its associated attributions of relevance needs to be allowed for. In particular, in seems reasonable for those attributions of relevance to be negotiated between the implicated parties rather than unilaterally proclaimed by the most powerful. Consistency loses its morally legitimising appeal if the basis of relevance against which it is attributed is contested. This requirement is alluded to by those research participants who discuss the legitimating force of consistency. Their discourse tends to dwell on the need for attributions of consistency to be commonly accepted as valid. It is important, they suggest, that “people” - in other words, those who are on the receiving end of the leader’s consistent application of principle — feel that they are being treated in a consistent manner. Indeed, according to David, the most outspoken advocate of consistency, the people in his organization care more about consistency of application than they do about to the content of the principles being applied. Clearly, it would not do for David to consistently apply principle according to an understanding of consistency that did not concur with that of those employees. Consistency would lose its moral credibility if implicated parties considered attributions of consistency to be haphazard, arbitrary or just plain wrong.

So, on the one hand, the notion of consistency does seem to have something important to say to moral leadership; it offers at least a legitimating core.
transformational leadership theorists, some principle-based ethicists and some research participants point to this morally legitimating core. This is that leaders ought not to use the influence of their position to privilege their own material interests and career aspirations or those of their social and professional allies. However, the assumption that leaders can stand apart from their organizational contexts, cool-headedly dispensing moral justice in accordance with the consistent application of principle is unhelpful. Such a depiction obscures the contestable nature of attributions of consistency as well as the inevitable complexity of the organizational contexts within which those attributions are made.

Given this contestable nature, monological pronouncements of consistency on the part of leaders are likely to rest on unstable foundations. The legitimating force of consistency only works against a presupposition of multi-lateral agreement. The most we can say for unilateral proclamations of consistency is that they offer leaders a potential source of self-regulation against personal misuse of power. The only unilateral act of consistency that seems apposite to moral leaders is that they should take care not to use the privilege of power and influence that attends their position in order to champion vested interests. Beyond this, moral probity requires agreement on the terms upon which attributions of consistency are made and this demands a dialogical, rather than a monological stance.

Suppressing Emotion in Order to Do the Right Thing

In speaking of the importance of consistent application of principles, a number of research participants also dwell on the need to suppress their emotions. In particular, several speak of the need to overcome feelings of loyalty and partiality in order to do what they consider to be the right thing. When confronted with moral dilemmas, they consider it their responsibility to apply principle in a rational, cool-headed and dispassionate manner. In dealing with morally charged issues, the heart should not be allowed to rule the head.

This understanding concurs with a Kantian (1997 [1788; 1948 [1797]) notion of ethics: that ethical conduct consists of doing what reason tells us is our duty. According to Kant, emotions such as charity and benevolence fall under the heading of imperfect duties. Although not devoid of moral worth, such sentiments should take second place to the perfect duties that are apprehended via the application of moral reason. For Kant, acting in response to the "imperfect" duties indicated by moral sentiment is a frivolity that is permissible only after the main business of rational, "perfect" duty has been dealt with.
However, the accounts offered by research participants indicate that cool-headed, rational application of principle can be a challenging undertaking. It is not an easy thing to overlook feelings of partiality towards familiar faces, and participants' accounts of having to do so exhibit quite a lot of personal trauma. Nevertheless, their leadership duty, as they present it, is to set aside such misgivings. According to this understanding, moral leadership demands dispassionate application of principle; there is no space for sentimentality.

This valorisation of rational duty, and its associated emotional discomfort, features in particular in participants' accounts of redundancy scenarios. Many recount the personal distress that they have experienced when laying off people with whom they were personally acquainted. Patrick even tells of not only having had to lay off a colleague at whose wedding he had been the best man but also having had to conceal from this colleague, for six months, his impending redundancy. This was hard for Patrick to do. Nevertheless he, like others faced with similarly heart-rending choices, did what he was morally obliged to do: act with the dispassion that his leadership role enjoins.

Even when the casualties of their tough, rationally driven actions are not close colleagues, research participants report discomforting sympathy for the predicaments that they bring about. But such is the burden of leadership: leaders must not permit the indulgences of sentiment to intrude on their decisions. Whereas those in less exalted roles might feel inclined to take the soft course and act on their emotions, leaders must avoid such urges in order to dispense moral justice in a level-headed and even-handed manner. It is the unpleasant, but nevertheless necessary, task of leaders to do what the voice of reason tells them has to be done. That is what, as one research participant emphatically states, he is paid to do.

But is this really what moral judgement is all about? David Hume (1985 [1738]; 1998 [1752]) alerted us over two-hundred-and-fifty years ago to the role played by passion in moral evaluation. Subsequent efforts by Enlightenment thinkers to banish this untrustworthy and uncontrollable aspect from the field of moral debate have not been entirely successful. Ethical judgement's ineluctable emotive dimension was re-emphasised by the logical positivists in the early-to-mid-twentieth century. It is also a fundamental aspect of existentialist philosophy. Thus, William Barrett (1990 [1958]) speaks of existentialism's contribution to the "flight from Laputa", that world of unbridled rationality encountered by Gulliver on his fictitious travels. According to existentialist theory, Enlightenment rationality would be of little use to the leader in apprehending moral probity.
These ideas are captured by Zygmunt Bauman's (1993) description of how disinterested application of moral principle detaches us from our moral sense. Drawing upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Bauman proposes that the nature of moral commitment can only be accessed through direct, face-to-face encounter with people who are affected by our actions. Bauman observes the tendency for social organization to separate us from such encounters, or at least to suppress their affects. It thus makes redundant the moral sense, substituting it with a cruel, rational accounting that is consistent with the bureaucratic expectations of the contemporary organizational world.

Parker (2002) echoes Bauman's theme when he reflects on ways in which contemporary forms of organizing might be inimical to traditional notions of workplaces as communities. Parker notes, in particular, how globally dispersed organization, in which electronic communication increasingly replaces face-to-face encounters, tends to undermine any sense of local responsibility amongst senior management. He also recounts deliberate actions taken by companies to distance senior managers from exposure to the consequences of their decisions, thus making it easier for them to “downsize without looking employees in the eye” (2002: 85).

According to writers such as Levinas and Bauman, the consistent application of principle, far from morally invigorating workplaces, denudes them of moral sensitivity. By conforming to the expectations of rational moral law, leaders who describe the pain of suppressed partiality are, on this account, cutting themselves off from the moral sense upon which ethically responsive decision-making depends. So the research participant who suppresses his contrition at withholding, from close associates, the news of their impending redundancy may be ignoring an important cue to the ethical legitimacy of his subterfuge. Similarly, those leaders who silence the inner voice of remorse while cutting the jobs of loyal colleagues in the interest of productivity gains could be denying themselves access to a key indicator of the rightness of their actions. And the person who eschews leniency to dismiss long-serving employees on a matter of rational principle may be repressing insights that would have enabled a more morally-balanced decision. Like the Boeing CEO who moved the company's corporate head office away from its production plant in Seattle to loosen any ties of loyalty to the workforce (Kaghan, cited in Parker 2002), these leaders are eschewing the life blood of moral decision-making. Instead of subsuming their emotional misgivings under a tide of supposedly rational, moral accounting, they might do well to recognise that those misgivings have something important to say about the moral quality of their actions. Moral sentiment sends important messages. Censoring these messages out of
organizational decision-making may deprive it of the nutrients that it needs to sustain its ethical quality.

Now to suggest that, in evaluating the ethicality of their actions, leaders ought to respond to the messages sent by their emotions is not to propose non-reflective sentimentality as a basis for ethical leadership. In emphasising the part played by passions, writers from Hume to Bauman are not advocating that emotion is all there is to moral judgement. By proposing that the ultimate grounding point of any ethical decision must lie in some form of emotional commitment, there writers do not seek to banish cognitive processes from the field of ethics. Rather, they envisage interplay between cognitive reason and moral sentiment, in which each supports the other. Our emotional responses to situations can be informed through reflection and discussion, particularly where that discussion involves those who are implicated in those situations. So to draw attention to the role that moral sentiment might play in guiding leadership decision making is not to claim hegemony for it; it is simply to appeal for it to be permitted entry to the leader’s moral calculus.

So, on the one hand, there seems to be something important in the notion that organizational leaders might need to overcome feelings of partiality in order to do the right thing. In particular, it would seem wrong to privilege the interests of those in-groups to which the leader might be tied by relationships of common interest. It is also reassuring to find leaders willing to step back from the seething turmoil of emotional immediacy in order to make considered judgements that embrace a range of perspectives. However, to present such reflection as no more than a monological exercise in rational accounting is likely to be self-defeating. The notion that a leader can stand as captain on the bridge of the ship of moral evaluation, cool-headedly directing in accordance with the principles of ethical navigation is as unhelpful to organizational leadership as it is to sailing a ship. Just as a ship’s captain depends on intimate encounters with the marine environment in order to make well-informed navigational calls, so does the ethical quality of leadership thrive on the emotional messages that attend leaders’ exposure to the consequences of their decision making.

For the Good of the Organization

A common feature of my discussions with practising leaders is that they attach moral primacy to sustaining their organizations. The survival and prosperity of the organization is generally presented as an overriding preoccupation that trumps other moral considerations. However, it is also apparent that the good of the organization is not seen as carrying categorical value. Rather, its survival and prosperity is accorded value insofar as this
promotes the interests of stakeholders. In other words, ensuring the good of the organization is valorised because this enables research participants to fulfil their perceived responsibilities to various people.

It is unsurprising that leaders should prioritise the organizations that they lead and that they should do so on the basis of protecting the interests of those who are associated with those organizations. A sense of responsibility to the organization and its stakeholders seems intuitively reasonable as a moral basis for action. Such an understanding accords with the emphasis that some charismatic (Howell, 1988; Conger and Kanungo, 1998) and transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) theorists who place on altruism as a moral indicator, where altruistic sentiment is focused on the constituency that is led by the leader.

The ethical theoretical perspective that best captures this prioritisation of the organization is a utilitarian one. Its underpinning assumption is that leaders have a responsibility to maximise the good of certain groups of people and that they are best placed to achieve this end by maximising the good of the organization. It might thus be characterised as a rule utilitarian rationale, in which the rule of promoting the survival and prosperity of the organization is taken as proxy for maximising the interests of its stakeholders.

Given the difficulties associated with making utilitarian calculations, a rule utilitarian approach of this nature seems sensible. It responds to the difficulty of predicting, analysing and evaluating various courses of action when confronted with moral conundrums. Instead of trying to foresee the potential consequences of their decisions, before carrying out complex utilitarian calculations, leaders simply have to do what they believe will best sustain the organization, safe in the belief that this will maximise the good for relevant stakeholders. This approach therefore relieves to some extent the leaders’ burden of moral sagacity. It also compensates for the hazard that utilitarian calculations may be distorted by the stance from which the leader makes them.

The notion of stakeholding has received quite a lot of attention in the business ethics literature since Freeman (1984) introduced it to corporate governance theory. In efforts to clarify the “blurred character of the stakeholder concept” (Donaldson and Preston 1995: 66), distinctions have been made between contrasting interpretations of stakeholding, or different ways in which a person might be regarded as a stakeholder of an organization. In particular, business ethics commentators have focused on the difference between instrumental and normative stakeholder theory (Donaldson and Preston, ibid) or, as Kaler
(2002) puts it, the distinction between regarding stakeholders as *influencers* and regarding them as *claimants*.

Helpful though this instrumental-normative distinction is, I do not believe that it offers an adequate framework for capturing the understanding of moral leadership that I am describing here. For Donaldson and Preston, instrumental stakeholder theory focuses on the connection between stakeholder-management and the achievement of “traditional corporate objectives (e.g. profitability, growth)” (1995: 71). Normative stakeholder theory, on the other hand, concerns the function of the organization and is based around the notion of “some underlying or philosophical principles... [which are] not hypothetical but categorical” (ibid: 72). According to this depiction, normative stakeholding is offered as a basis for opposing shareholder theory, the Friedmanesque prioritisation of shareholder wealth, by pointing to the intrinsic moral worth of all the stakeholders who have some form of relationship with the organization. In contrast, instrumental stakeholding is cast as an amoral, or perhaps even an immoral, perspective, which values stakeholders for no reason other than their importance to the achievement of corporate success. Normative stakeholding thus radiates a comforting, moral glow while instrumental stakeholding reflects the steely glint of Machiavellian calculation.

This strict divide between normative and instrumental stakeholder theory is, I believe, misleading. It oversimplifies things by presenting too stark a contrast between, on the one hand, the amoral or shareholder-driven prioritisation of commercial performance, where stakeholders are only attended to insofar as they serve that end, and, on the other hand, considering stakeholders as intrinsically deserving of moral regard. This overlooks the capacity of instrumental stakeholding to contain a normative element; a normative element that is not exhausted by the shareholder rights discourse (e.g. Friedman, 1970; Hayek, 1969 [1960]; Sternberg, 1998; 1999; 2000). In other words, it obscures the possibility that prioritising commercial performance may contain a moral dimension that goes beyond responding to the rights of shareholders.

The rule utilitarian style justification to which I am referring here expresses that moral dimension. The preoccupation with corporate success that these research participants articulate cannot be explained as an inability or unwillingness on their part to see beyond the iron bars of bureaucratic efficiency. Nor can it be dismissed as a happy congruence between corporate achievement and their own short-term and long-term material gain. Furthermore, this moral dimension is more than an expression of the primacy of
shareholder rights. Indeed, those who spoke of shareholders tended to downplay or dismiss the importance of the latter in their hierarchy of moral commitments.

For these people, prioritising commercial performance and thus ensuring the prosperity and survival of the organization is a moral imperative. It is so because doing this will promote the interests of those people to whom these leaders feel morally responsible; that is, not just to the shareholders of the organization, who they tend to talk down, but to all those who depend upon it and most importantly to its employees. For this reason, they feel morally justified in acting in ways that are detrimental to the interests of small groups of employees. The moral rationale for doing so is that this serves the interests of the majority of what I referred to in my empirical report as intrinsic normative stakeholders; those people who depend upon the survival and prosperity of the organization. These are the stakeholders to whom research participants tend to accord categorical moral significance; these are the key members of their perceived universe of moral relevance.

Some research participants exhibit what Donaldson and Preston describe as a tendency to “slide easily from one theoretical base to another” (1993: 72) in accounting for their responsibilities to stakeholders. I described in my empirical report the ambivalence that characterises some people’s accounts of their moral responsibilities. They seem uncertain whether their moral responsibility towards stakeholders derives from the categorical worth of those people or from their significance in influencing the success of the organization. According to Donaldson and Preston’s distinction, this would be described as confusion between a normative understanding and an instrumental understanding of stakeholding. I suggest, however, that even these people articulate a normative understanding. Insofar as those influencers are accorded instrumental significance, this is not a morally vacuous significance. It derives from the moral compulsion that these research participants feel themselves to be under to promote the survival and prosperity of their organizations. And this responsibility for the organization can be further rationalised in terms of the interests of those dependent stakeholders who are thus cared for. For this reason, I described this regard for stakeholders-as-influencers as a normative instrumental stakeholder understanding.

However, despite the undoubted ethical tone of the rule utilitarian rationale that emerges in research participants’ discourse, I nevertheless find that discourse problematic. My concern relates to the ease with which organizational survival slides into organizational prosperity as a moral imperative. While it is easy to align the survival of the organization with the interests of those who depend upon it, this association is not quite so straightforward in the
case of its prosperity. Consider, for example, the organization’s employees. The association between the survival of the organization and employees’ interests is clear: if the organization goes down, they lose their jobs. However, it is far from clear that small enhancements to the prosperity of the organization will serve the interests of employees. Indeed, where these enhancements are achieved through efficiency measures such as “downsizing”, “de-layering”, “offshoring” or simply by keeping pay levels as low as possible, there is a tangible conflict with employee well-being. But there are also many other ways in which productivity enhancements may erode the quality of the employment experience and thus chip away at the welfare of those employees whose interests are held in such high esteem by most research participants. These might include the potential intensification of risk and stress borne by employees as a consequence of the imposition of performance-related reward structures (Heery, 2000; Winstanley, 2000) or flexible working patterns (Stanworth, 2000); the potentially intrusive impact of ostensibly performance-enhancing, occupational testing instruments (Baker and Cooper, 2000); or the impact of aggressive and stressful selection processes on employees’ dignity and self-esteem (Spence, 2000).

Some participants explicitly address this question by warning of the insidious creep of inefficiency. They point out that failure on their part to attend to opportunities for small productivity gains today may result in the collapse of the organization tomorrow. There is something in this. In the increasingly competitive organizational landscape, to which business strategy theorists are eager to alert us, it is understandable that leaders feel morally compelled to keep their organizations on their toes. However, to assume that prosperity must always be maximised in order to ensure survival is a misleading oversimplification. It obscures the magnitude of the negative consequences that small efficiency measures may have for employees; efficiency measures which may have only a minimal impact on the organization’s capacity to resist predation but which may nevertheless have severe repercussions for the very people who are valorised by the moral rationale in whose name they are taken.

Karen Legge offers a critical observation on the moral legitimisation of efficiency that underpins accounts such as these. Its consequence is that “‘tough love’ in all its forms is morally justifiable: [that] employees may be compelled to work harder and more flexibly for ‘their own good’ and they may be made redundant for the greater good” (1998: 163). This preoccupation with efficiency clearly makes a highly contestable, unitarist-style assumption that all dependent stakeholders are able to share in the fruits of minor commercial enhancements. Maybe oversimplifications such as this are an unavoidable
characteristic of the application of rule utilitarian ethical rationales. In easing the burden of prediction, evaluation and analysis that attends moral judgement, it is perhaps inevitable that rule utilitarianism will fail to respond to the ineluctable complexity of moral judgement. However, to follow clear and simple prescriptions which end up undermining the very basis that they are intended to serve seems a particularly inadequate response to that complexity.

There is, then, undoubtedly a moral tone to the rationale that most research participants offer for their preoccupation with the survival and prosperity of the organization. Although this moral tone is not easily expressed in the terms of the most prominent commentaries on stakeholding, it is nevertheless present. However, by bundling together the prosperity and the survival of the organization as equally legitimate means to the achievement of morally desirable ends, leaders may find themselves undermining those very ends. To conflate the survival of the organization with its prosperity and to offer both as an identical rationale for leadership decision-making is to misrepresent the congruence between incremental enhancements to organizational success and the interests of dependent stakeholders. The continued survival of the organization may indeed be in the interests of its dependent stakeholders. However, this should not excuse every measure taken to keep the organization in a position of unchallengeable competitive dominance. Greater responsiveness of the potential human downside of productivity enhancement measures may evoke a more balanced assessment of the moral desirability of those measures.

Looking after the People who Matter

Despite the difficulties presented by the rule utilitarian rationale that research participants commonly offer in support of their cost-trimming endeavours, the preoccupation with stakeholders that is implicit in that rationale is nevertheless encouraging. These leaders are not unconcerned with the moral impact of their organizations' activities on stakeholders; they do not seem to be driven by a morally negligent obsession with rational effectiveness or even by the happy congruence of organizational success with their own material reward. Nor is their preoccupation with the good of the organization driven by prioritisation of shareholders over other stakeholders. They care about morality and they believe that, in furthering the commercial health of the organization, they will be furthering the interests of the people to whom they accord moral relevance. This is all good news for anyone who believes that morality should matter for leaders; that they should consider the people who are impacted by their actions; and that the morally relevant group does not end with the company's owners.
However, while taking encouragement from the concern for people that these leaders articulate, I also have reservations about the way in which they define *which* people matter morally and the extent to which their rule utilitarian rationale serves those people best. In this respect, there is some ambivalence about who matters and why they matter. On the one hand, the people who are placed on the pedestal of moral relevance by the rule utilitarian rationale that I have discussed are those who depend upon the survival and, as I have pointed out above, to a less self-evident extent, upon the prosperity of the organization. However, a slightly different criterion of moral relevance emerged when I asked research participants *why* certain people have moral significance for them. The most common response to my question about why they consider they have responsibilities to certain groups relates to the *affect* that their decisions have on those groups: the fact that their decisions and the activities of their organizations have a significant affect on these peoples’ lives seems to generate, in their mind, a moral responsibility to them. Thus employees and their families are accorded particular moral significance by most participants because they are profoundly aware of the impact that their decisions have on these people. Similarly, some broaden the scope of their moral responsibilities in recognition of the social and environmental impact of their organizations’ activities.

There is a possible contradiction here that is best conceptualised by the distinction, which I drew in my empirical report, between *dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders* and *affected intrinsic normative stakeholders*. Dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders are those people who depend in some way upon the prosperity of the organization. Employees and shareholders obviously fall into this group, along with people such as suppliers and perhaps also customers. The interests of all these groups are linked by a dependency relationship with the organization. These are the people whose interests are purportedly served by participants’ rule-utilitarian-style preoccupation with the survival and prosperity of the organization. All of these dependent stakeholders also fall into the category of *affected* stakeholder: due to their dependency relationship, these people are clearly affected by the organization’s activities. However, affected stakeholders also include other people who do not have a formal or informal dependency relationship with the organization but who are nevertheless affected by its activities. This includes all those people and communities which bear the social and ecological consequences of corporate activity. For example, businesses such as the pub trade, the travel industry and food production have an enormous impact on society and on the environment. They therefore affect many people - geographically close and geographically remote; present generation and future generations – who do not *depend* in any way on the survival and prosperity of the organization.
My concern with the justification for prioritising organizational survival and prosperity that is offered by research participants is that it may indeed embrace the interests of organizations' dependent intrinsic normative stakeholders. However, it pays no particular heed to its affected intrinsic normative stakeholders. Many people who are deeply affected by the activities of the organization are thus precluded from consideration by the moral calculus of the leader. This justification thus courts the challenge that writers such as Price (2003) level against the pernicious, narrowly-defined altruism that is valorised by some leadership theorists. Price points out how, by distinguishing leadership’s shining knights from their sinister, tarnished counterparts on the basis of the former’s altruistic intent, these theorists underplay the hazards presented by leaders who uphold the interests of an in-group over and above all other considerations. The case of Radovan Karadzic offers a topical illustration of this issue from the political arena. Karadzic did a lot during the early-1990s to further the interests of the Serbian people of Bosnia. Karadzic does not seem to have been a self-interested egotist; he believed deeply in the ideological cause that he furthered in such a brutal manner. However, the consequences of his altruistic care for his dependent stakeholders had disastrous consequences for his affected stakeholders, most notably the Muslim people of Bosnia who were massacred on his orders.

To compare the sophisticated, suavely-tailored leaders of Western European and American work organizations with one of the worst initiators of ethnic cleansing in recent times may seem unfair to the former. However, given the global spread, the intrusive social impact and the far reaching environmental consequences of the decisions that these people make, omitting affected groups from their universe of relevance could have similarly tragic repercussions. Through their influence over the activities of their organizations, these people carry awesome power. That they exercise that power in the interests of a narrowly circumscribed group of dependent stakeholders who stand to gain today, tomorrow and next year from their dependency relationship with the organization, without a thought for the far more numerous groups who are affected by those organizations now and in the future is troubling. It is also inconsistent with the sense of responsibility that many of them articulate for these affected stakeholders. On the one hand they speak of the moral responsibilities that are generated by the potency of their role; on the other hand, they proffer, as a guide to ethical decision-making, a rule utilitarian rationale that precludes large swathes of the people who their decisions affect.

That these people care about the moral dimension of organizational leadership is comforting. That they include in their moral calculations the consequences of their actions
on groups other than shareholders is also comforting to anyone who believes that shareholder theory offers an inadequate basis for corporate governance ethics. However, to venerate the survival and prosperity of their organizations as the ultimate indicator of moral probity is both negligent of the broader impacts of those organizations and inconsistent with the moral narrative that is offered by most research participants. Even if a focus on the survival and prosperity of the organization is indeed in the best interests of its dependent stakeholders, this says nothing of the interests of its affected stakeholders. While the stakeholder sensitivity that is articulated by practising leaders is encouraging, it would be far more encouraging to see greater thought given to the repercussions of organizational activities for people who are not linked to the organization by a dependency relationship. In particular, it would be reassuring to find leaders paying greater attention to those stakeholders for whom geographic and temporal distance from the organization does not diminish the impact of its activities.

Facilitating the Development of Followers

Quite a few of the leaders who took part in my research described the pleasure that they derive from seeing their employees progress. When I asked what gave them the most satisfaction in their business careers, several spoke about releasing potential in people. I was struck by their interest in employee development and in the role that they, as leaders, can play in helping their people to grow. This is consistent with the general attentiveness to employees noted earlier. I have already drawn attention to the central role that employees play in research participants’ universes of moral relevance. They figure most prominently in participants’ utilitarian calculi, both as beneficiaries and as the victims whose privation lends those calculi their morally perplexing tone. It is therefore unsurprising that these leaders value employee development so highly and that they emphasise their own contribution to facilitating that development.

The theme of employee development also looms large in the leadership effectiveness literature, lending intuitive moral worth to theoretical accounts. For example, human relations-oriented leadership prescriptions (e.g. Hemphill and Coons, 1957; Lickert, 1970; Blake and Morton, 1985) emphasise attending to the development needs of people, while those commentaries that stress the effectiveness of feminine leadership qualities (e.g. Johnson, 1976; Rosener, 1990) draw attention to the nurturing role that leaders can play. A developmental preoccupation is also evident in the attention paid by transformational leadership theorists to providing “intellectual stimulation” for, and giving “individualised consideration” to, employees (Bass, 1985; 1990) and also to “empowering and developing
potential” (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2001). It is particularly congruent with the notion of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2002), a key element of which involves commitment to the “growth” of followers.

Now, this preoccupation with developing people seems to bestow upon leadership a certain amount of moral credit. The idea of organizational leaders ministering to the formational needs of their followers is compelling. If effective leadership entails stimulating followers’ career progression whilst also evoking their moral and emotional self-actualisation, then effective leadership seems to have a lot going for it ethically. However, before we get too carried away by this enticing vision of organizational leaders as custodians of the material, intellectual and emotional flourishing of their followers, it is as well to highlight some grounds upon which it might give cause for concern.

The first point is that the moral allure of an employee development focus, like that of relationship-oriented leadership in general, becomes a little tarnished if that focus is switched on-and-off in response to pragmatic need. In this respect, the discourses of some of the leaders with whom I spoke during empirical research exhibited a degree of ambivalence. Some seemed uncertain whether the value that they attach to employee development is intrinsic or whether it is contingent upon the contribution that that development might make to the commercial success of the organization. Those theoretical prescriptions for leadership effectiveness which advocate the adoption of apposite blends of employee-related and task-focused leadership behaviours in response to contingent need (e.g. Fiedler, 1967; Hersey and Blanchard, 1982) may serve to foster such instrumentally-driven affectation. These call to mind Alvesson and Willmott’s description of the emancipatory and humanistic pretensions of progressive management theories, which “serve to advance and legitimise an expansion of systems of management control that aspire to infiltrate the hearts and minds of employees” (1998: 34).

Against this ambivalent allocation of moral worth and the expedient instrumentality of these situational (Grint, 2000) accounts of leadership, our moral approbation of leaders who affect care for the development of their people seems to be at least partly dependent on a presumption of sincerity. If leaders only care for staff development insofar as this contributes to further objectives that are valued by that leader, this does not necessarily deprive their care of moral worth. But, as I have already discussed in elaborating the concept of instrumental normative stakeholding, such care would derive its moral worth from the moral worth of those further ends which it promotes. Moral worth would not be
intrinsic to it. In order for leaders’ care for people’s development to carry intrinsic worth, it seems reasonable to expect it to be heartfelt and genuine.

Charles Handy (1998) uses the phrase *unconditional positive regard* to describe such a disposition on the part of leaders. Handy compares unconditional positive regard to the unqualified love that a person feels towards close friends and family, contrasting this to a conditional regard that is premised upon an anticipated exchange of benefits. It is perhaps a little far fetched to expect organizational leaders to summon the same level of emotional commitment towards their employees as they feel towards their friends and family. Nevertheless, the moral worth of the mentoring, coaching and educative aspirations of leaders presupposes a disposition that is comparable at least in quality, if not in quantity, to that described by Handy.

A second potential area of concern with leaders’ preoccupation with the development of their people relates to how they define meritorious development. I drew attention, in my empirical report, to the tendency of some research participants to evaluate the desirability of employee enhancement according to their own, monologically-pronounced standards. On the other hand, a few are sensitive to the views of the recipients of their putative developmental endeavours. Those in the latter category tend to speak of the need for employees to value the development to which they have been subjected on their own terms rather than on the terms of the leader.

The monologically tinged approach is consistent with patriarchal and paternalistic approaches to leadership, which cast the leader as a beneficent arbiter of employees’ interests. In extreme cases, such approaches would legitimise leaders taking action that they perceived to be in the interest of employees even where those actions were directly against the will of employees. Such is Mark’s observation that it is sometimes his unpleasant, though necessary, task to inform employees that their interests would be better served if they left Mark’s organization and found work elsewhere. Less extreme manifestations of this benign paternalism may lead to leadership energies being focused in directions that, although well-meaning, are not quite so well received by their intended beneficiaries.

Now, such approaches as these might be morally justifiable according to certain consequentialist analyses. For example, welfare utilitarians might call upon leaders to act in what they perceive to be the long-term interests of employees, or objective-list utilitarians might approve of leaders bringing about ends which they consider to be objectively good for employees, even though employees do not immediately welcome the consequent
benefits. Nevertheless, the practical application of justifications such as these to the leadership domain depends upon some highly contestable assumptions. Notably, it assumes that leaders know best what is in employees’ long term interests, or that leaders are the best judge of what is objectively good for their employees. This seems to ask a lot of leaders. Not only must they carry all the usual paraphernalia that assures success in their role; they must also adopt the mantle of the organization’s agony aunt. Inviting employees to participate in the elucidation of their interests, and in the identification of personal development that might serve those interests, therefore seems a safer option than well-intended, paternalistic meddling.

Therefore, although commitment to facilitating followers’ development draws to leadership a certain amount of intuitive moral worth, this moral worth would be less contentious if two further conditions were met. Firstly, it is easier to applaud leaders’ developmental endeavours if they are driven by a sincere interest in their direct beneficiaries than if they are motivated purely by expediency. Secondly, the involvement of those beneficiaries in the identification and evaluation of worthwhile personal development would also enhance its morally legitimating force.

Building Commitment to a Shared Vision

A lot of the leadership literature emphasises the role played by leaders in building support for a shared vision. This notion is particularly prominent in some transformational leadership literature, where it also acquires a moral dimension that links with the topic of employee development that I have just discussed. As far as theorists such as Burns (1978; 2003) and Bass (1985; 1990) are concerned, the fundamental, morally legitimating core of transforming or transformational leadership lies in the self-actualisation that followers achieve by participating in a shared endeavour. These theorists propose that such participation raises followers above the level of self-interested, transactional exchange and evokes the real humanity within them that can only be achieved through being part of a common purpose.

It is easy to see how generating shared commitment helps leaders to achieve organizational success. If all workers are contributing wholeheartedly to the achievement of an organization’s objectives, rather than weighing up the transactional costs and benefits of each and every input, then productivity is likely to be enhanced. On the face of it, this is also a harmless enough notion from an ethical perspective. There seems to be something in the idea that it is good for people to be part of something and that they may become, in
some way, "better" people as a consequence of such participation. This smacks of the social understanding of humanity upon which the intersubjectivist ethics that I reviewed earlier is premised. However, this commendation of building commitment to a shared vision also poses a number of questions.

The first question concerns the definition of the common purpose to which the leader engenders self-actualising support from followers: in other words, who sets the agenda? A common response to this question in the leadership literature is to place the definitional onus on the leader. Leaders are not only cast as those who can build commitment to a shared undertaking; they are generally portrayed as taking the lead in the identification of that transformational vision in the first place. Whether it concerns the setting of strategic goals, the shaping of a shared culture or the establishment of core values, leadership writers of many hues describe how leaders are able to generate visions that capture the imagination of organizational members and take those organizations to better places. Several of the leaders who I encountered during empirical research articulated a similar theme, reflecting on their role in establishing their organizations' common, moral agenda. Although some spoke of sharing this definitional task, the extent of intersubjective participation usually started and ended with senior management. A strong note of unilateralism is therefore apparent in relation to the setting of a shared direction, both from my research and from broader theoretical and empirical studies. I have already touched on some difficulties that this might present for ethical legitimisation of organizational agendas, particularly in relation to the demands it places on leaders' moral sagacity, and I will say more about this shortly.

The second question concerns the possible effects of their participation upon those who are embraced by leaders' transformational inclusiveness. Despite the intuitive allure of group participation, and despite the self-actualising propensity that transformational leadership theorists claim for it, commentators from various fields have drawn attention to its potential to affect participants in less desirable ways. From a philosophical perspective, Heidegger (1962 [1926]) warns that people might dissolve their individuality in the "averageness" of the crowd. This, for Heidegger, is one manifestation of an inauthentic form of Being: succumbing to the temptation to renounce ones agentic autonomy and blend in with ones intersubjective context. Social commentators have also drawn attention to the disagreeable

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30 Although organizations' broader strategic missions clearly have considerable ethical implications and cannot be separated from discussions about morality, participants tended to focus, in my research discussions, on the importance of a shared moral code and on the role that they play in defining this. This focus is to be expected given the ethics-oriented nature of my questioning.
ramifications of fealty to a large collective. For example, Festinger et al (1952) use the term *deindividuation* to describe how participation may engender in group members a sense of anonymity that loosens constraints on their behaviour. This may lead to a reduced sense of responsibility, heightened inclination to act impulsively and an increased propensity to commit violence and other forms of antisocial act. Marion Hampton (1999), looking specifically at the impact of group membership in work contexts, notes its capacity to induce conformity, depress individual intelligence and eliminate moral responsibility. She proposes that this, along with the powerful feelings of loyalty, anxiety or anger that often attend group membership, can lead to suffering and despair in members and may even encourage them to perpetuate acts of great cruelty.

The field of identity work may also have something important to say on this topic. Identity work seeks to illuminate the way in which individuals embedded within organizations create and experience the subjective meanings which shape their responses to questions such as: "'Who am I? – and, by implication – 'How should I act?'" (Alvesson et al, 2008: 6). Now, leadership may be presented as a benign undertaking which helps followers to negotiate a pathway between the conflicting demands of multiple personal and professional identities as they seek to respond to such questions (e.g. Hill and Stephens, 2005). On the other hand Alvesson et al (ibid) offer a more critical perspective from which leaders' transformational endeavours to unite followers to a common agenda might be understood as an attempt on the part of elites to orchestrate identities within a managerially inspired discourse; one which offers the totem of the organization as the primary source of identification and which thus marginalises those sources which draw on extra-organizational affiliations.

A further issue with unequivocal veneration of participation in a common undertaking concerns those who might be excluded from such participation for one reason or another. There may be people who fall under a leader's sphere of influence who do not wish to commit themselves to the full gamut of emotional belongingness that is acclaimed by transformational theorists. Some may prefer, instead, to regard their workplace as no more than a stage upon which to satisfy basic material needs. That these choose to restrict their relationship with an organization to the level of transactional exchange would be considered by transformational leadership theorists as in indication of failure on the part of the leader. However, given the reservations about inclusion just mentioned, that some take shelter from the transformational thrall of a leader's all-consuming vision should come as no surprise. So what is to become of these people? Are they to be cast aside; stigmatised; rejected as being unsuitable for organizational membership?

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On the other hand, other people may find themselves excluded, not by a deliberate act of choice on their part, but because they do not fit the mould out of which suitability for inclusion is cast. In discussing the idea of organizations as communities of citizens, Parker observes that, amongst other failings, such a depiction makes a highly contestable assumption of homogeneity amongst its so-called citizens. However, organizational citizenship projects are likely to present criteria of inclusion to which not all of the organizational community conform, with the consequence that non-conformist "others" come to be regarded by the in-majority as in some way uncivilised or uncivilisable. Leaders' bold aspirations of inclusion are thus likely to appeal to what Parker describes as "a unifying category" (2002: 57) that reflects the attitudes and priorities of dominant members, and particularly those of the leader. Those whose difference disqualifies them from this unifying category may find the self-actualising gift of transformational inclusion denied to them.

So, it seems reasonable to suppose that people's experience of organizational life will be enhanced by the camaraderie and inclusiveness that comes from working towards a common goal. It is nice to be part of something and it is heartening to know that one's efforts contribute towards an agenda that is valued by others. If leaders are able to generate that sense of togetherness and if they can facilitate agreement around a shared agenda, then their leadership draws a certain amount of moral credit. In that respect, transformational leadership theorists offer an important insight to the morality of leadership. However, sensitivity, on the part of theorists and leaders, to the hazards presented by the latter's transformational endeavours might ameliorate some of those hazards. It would be reassuring to see both theorists and practitioners place greater emphasis on encouraging participation in the definition of shared agendas, rather than just on generating fealty to those agendas. Sensitivity to the negative repercussions of being part of a group undertaking would also be comforting. Responsiveness to leadership's propensity to erode followers' critical judgement would be especially encouraging. Furthermore, while it is important to acknowledge the potentially enriching role of the collective in the creation and sustenance of people's self identity, it is also important to acknowledge the threat that collective identity may present to followers' self-worth and also to extra-organizational sources of affiliation. And lastly, the radiance of self-actualising transformation should not be permitted to eclipse either the more prosaic agendas of some followers or their entitlement to pursue such agendas. Nor should it conceal the predispositions that inevitably underpin the valorisation of specific projects and specific notions of community, and which are likely to present barriers to the inclusion of those who do not share or conform to those...
predispositions. Were all transformational theorists\(^{31}\) and practising leaders to articulate greater responsiveness to these issues, then it would be easier to uphold the ethical legitimacy of the celebratory prescriptions for leadership effectiveness offered by the first group and the self-elucidative accounts offered by the second.

**Taking Responsibility for Morality**

Most of the practising leaders who I met during the course of my research struck me as very keen to take charge in relation to morality. This characteristic accords with the depiction of leadership that is overwhelmingly presented in the literature. Qualities such as dominance and self-assurance are valorised by the early trait theories and also by more recent descriptions of charismatic leadership. Those writers who differentiate leaders from managers also tend to emphasise the willingness of the former to take initiatives and make decisions on behalf of others. Their salutary descriptions of leaders as wholesome change-agents are contrasted to the somewhat pejorative picture of bureaucratic managers who restrict themselves to maintaining the status-quo. Even those behavioural theorists who champion a human relations-friendly approach tend to portray the leader as the arbiter of the right amount of relationship-orientation. Situational theorists, in particular, present effective leaders as those who, like military strategists, are able to skilfully assess the terrain into which they propose to conduct their leadership intervention before selecting an apposite blend of respect-for-persons and task-focus. I have already remarked how prominent versions of “new-paradigm” (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2004) leadership also focus on the need for leaders to call the shots. For example, the self-actualising gifts that Bernard Bass (1985; 1990) ascribes to transformational leaders are not presented as stardust to be sprinkled willy-nilly; they are tools to be carefully and selectively applied in order to bring about ends that are pre-defined by the leader.

But after all, is this not what leadership is all about? What are we to expect of leaders if not that they lead? Even the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a leader as “the person who leads, commands, or precedes a group, organization, or country”. Should I be surprised, then, that the leaders who I met during the course of my empirical research carry their general eagerness to direct into the domain of moral decision-making. If these people habitually take command, and if their ascendance to positions of pre-eminence in their organizations is a consequence of their effectiveness in doing so, to expect them to set aside

\(^{31}\) Beverley Alimo-Metcalfe and John Alban-Metcalfe’s accounts of transformational leadership pay a great deal of attention to issues such as these. My observations here on the limited ethical purview of transformational leadership theory relates principally to the work of Bernard Bass.
the conductor's baton when they climb upon the moral podium would seem unrealistic. Readiness to take ownership of moral decision-making is particularly evident amongst those research participants who approximate to the Moral Crusader ideal type. However, even those who demonstrate a less autocratic style are keen to retain their power of veto, just in case others try to point the organization's moral agenda in the "wrong" direction.

At first glance, principle-based theory and existentialism both seem to present a supportive foundation for unilateral, moral decision-making. They thus offer a glimmer of legitimation for those leaders who assume moral monocracy on behalf of their organizations. Principle-based ethics demands that leaders who aspire to moral probity identify an appropriate set of principles and apply these in a consistent and detached manner. In theory, this is something that leaders should be able to do on their own without calling upon others to audit their moral pronouncements. However, on closer examination, the monological application of principle-based ethics is problematic. Given the practical difficulties associated with applying principle-based theory, and also the inherent complexity of moral dilemmas, it seems unrealistic to expect anyone to single-handedly wield the gavel of moral legislator. Monological application of principle-based ethics would demand a degree of moral sagacity on the part of organizational leaders that we have no reason to suppose they possess. Despite their undoubtedly impressive range of personal capabilities, CEOs, MDs and company directors are not necessarily imbued with a higher level of ethical perspicuity than anyone else. So, given the potency of their decision-making, the idea that the moral implications of those decisions should be evaluated unilaterally is troubling.

Existentialism's veneration of authenticity also promises, on the face of it, a legitimation of moral unilateralism. If the only criterion against which moral pronouncements are to be assessed is the intensity of personal commitment with which they are made, then the self-assured moral autocrat seems to offer a valid template for ethical leadership. However, moral autocracy necessarily erodes opportunities for others to realise their authenticity. Organizational leaders are not self-contained, sole operators. The decisions that they make and the courses upon which they set their organizations shape the moral agendas of many. Authenticity is as important for those many as it is for the leader. Moral autocracy necessarily undermines opportunities for followers to exercise the choices and realise the self-actualising state of authenticity that writers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre cherish. Short of undertaking the wholesale "revaluation of values" envisaged by Nietzsche, and sharing his elitist veneration of the "super-man", existentialist theory offers little justification for elevating the authenticity of the leader over that of the led. Therefore,
despite its apparent friendliness to moral unilateralism, existentialism might also be interpreted as pointing towards a more facilitative model of moral leadership.

Judged against both principle-based and existentialist theory, then, moral unilateralism on the part of leaders is problematic. It is also self-evidently at odds with the principles of intersubjectivist ethics. Some of the points that I have made in this concluding chapter also indicate difficulties with the notion that leaders can unilaterally define moral probity without the need to consult others. While it is heartening to have conducted research discussions with leaders who care so much about ethics, that care would be even more reassuring were it accompanied by a willingness to consult about morality. To present moral rectitude as a matter for straightforward, commonsensical apprehension, as some participants do, is to misrepresent its complex, nuanced and contested character. The intricacies of moral evaluation are likely to be better catered for if leaders share the burden of judgement. The importance that some leaders attach to consistency also seems to say something important about morality. However, the legitimating force of consistency is premised upon shared agreement on the terms against which attributions of consistency are made. Multilateralism meets this assumption of agreement in a way that unilateralism does not. The desirability of consultation is also indicated by the nagging intrusion of sentiment into moral judgement. If emotional assaults upon rational calculation are viewed as important cues to the moral quality of our actions and decisions, then it seems important to also hear what other people’s moral sentiments are saying. The mutually supportive balance of emotive and cognitive processes is surely enhanced if it embraces the perspectives, both emotive and cognitive, of other people. My discussion of different interpretations of stakeholder-related responsibilities also underlines the need for consultation around moral issues: if the ultimate benchmark of moral leadership is, as some participants suggest, maximising the interests of the organization’s stakeholders, then surely leaders should incorporate the views of those stakeholders, or at least of their representatives, in decision making. Furthermore, the premium placed on employee development by the leadership literature and by my research participants seems to rely, for its morally legitimating force, on dialogue with those followers about the nature of that development. And lastly, the morally uplifting quality of participation in a common mission seems to depend to a large extent on the degree of consultative circumspection that accompanies consideration of that mission and of its impact on both participants and non-participants.

For a whole range of reasons, then, moral unilateralism on the part of leaders is problematic. On the one hand, it is heartening to know that leaders care enough about ethics to take personal responsibility for their organizations’ moral agendas. Those organizations
are likely to be far more morally responsive places if leaders use their influence to evoke reflection on the ethical implications of their activities. On the other hand, though, for leaders to approach their moral crusade as a sole undertaking surely inhibits its quality. For leaders to wield their authority in such a way that they make morality matter to organizations is one thing; for them to single-handedly define *what* matters morally and to impose that monological definition upon their stakeholders is quite another thing.

**Morality from One Side Only**

Given the problems associated with unilateral moral pronouncements on the part of leaders, it is comforting that most research participants are also willing to share the burden of moral authorship to some extent. Despite a general desire to take charge, all except the most autocratic advocate some form of participation in setting the moral tone of the organization and in confronting moral dilemmas. Expectations of moral sagacity are thus partially alleviated, while this participative mien also promises to disperse the gift of authenticity. The concerns to which I have alluded thus far in this concluding chapter are also eased if leaders are prepared to involve others in moral evaluation.

However, lest these nods in the direction of consultation are misinterpreted as manifestations of intersubjective zeal, it is important to draw attention to the circumscribed nature of the court of moral appeal that is thus accessed. Typically, this includes fellow directors, senior managers, consultants, mentors and close family members. Research participants make some allusion to including the views of non-managerial employees, but this is rare. More often, either they explicitly repudiate the legitimacy of junior employee involvement or they speak of practical barriers to broader consultation. These findings indicate the predominance of a managerialist understanding that is consistent with what Alvesson and Willmott refer to as a *maneggiare metaphor*; one which presents a senior management community as "an elite group or stratum, that is different from and superior to those they 'handle'" (1998: 29). The impression I gained from my discussions was that most of the leaders with whom I spoke see no more point in consulting about morality outside of this circumscribed group than Alvesson and Willmott's metaphorical "managers as handlers" see in consulting with those who they handle. Junior employees are thus portrayed as little more than the "'horses' who supply the labour, and have the managerial skills applied to them" (ibid).

The forums to which leaders appeal in support of their moral decision-making are therefore unlikely to be sufficiently diverse to provide significant exchange of opinion. More likely,
they will offer a reassuringly homogenous voice that confirms the leader’s stance. Instead of offering a platform to diverse groups of stakeholders, these forums admit only those who are singing enthusiastically from the senior management hymn sheet. A comforting chorus of affirmation of the leader’s inveterate moral commitments is thus more probable than any meaningful challenge to them. Such dialogue is unlikely to evoke critical reflection or to produce startling new perspectives. Nor will it do justice to the inherent complexity of moral decision making. Rather, it will sustain the illusion of morality as a simple and straightforward matter, perpetuating the notion that “we all know what’s right” so the only task of moral leadership is to ensure fealty to that self-evident path of moral rectitude.

The path to which fealty is thus evoked will be that which is expressive of a particular community; a community that, as many commentators (e.g.: Moss Kanter, 1977; Marshall, 1995; Alvesson and Wilmot, 1996; Hancock and Tyler, 2001; Parker, 2002) suggest, and also as one or two of my research participants have pointed out, is likely to be restricted in terms of its socio-economic, ethnic and gender make up. Thus, as Alvesson and Willmott, citing Deetz, suggest, “favoured” representations routinely operate to reproduce the prevailing pattern of domination as alternative representations are marginalised or suppressed” (1996: 202).

This is likely to shape leadership perceptions and behaviour across all of the dimensions that I have reviewed in this concluding chapter. Attributions of consistency will be primarily made from within the parameters of these favoured representations, thus potentially undermining the morally legitimating force of consistent application of principle. Any emotive responses that are embraced in ethical decision making will also be those of a characteristically white, male, middle-class constituency. In addition, by restricting entry to moral debate to colleagues, mentors, consultants and family members, the vast majority of dependent stakeholders, most notably the organization’s employees, will be precluded from taking part. Consequently, when the rule-utilitarian imperative of the survival and prosperity of the organization slides so far from the former to the latter that it undermines the interests of the very people that it is presumed to serve, those voices that are most likely to sound the alarm will not be heard. Moreover, insofar as the interests of affected stakeholders are considered at all, that consideration will be undermined by the non-participation and non-representation of most that group. Unilateral attributions of worth relating to the personal development of employees are also likely to be made from within this narrowly circumscribed frame of reference, as are the agendas and criteria for inclusion of those shared missions to which transformationally-inclined leaders rally support.
Towards a Normative Model of Moral Leadership

So where does all this leave us in terms of generating an understanding of moral leadership? My discussion so far in this concluding chapter has pointed towards some ways in which leadership might be moral. I have drawn on research discussions with practising leaders, synthesising this material with theoretical perspectives from the leadership and ethics literature in order to identify some characteristics of leadership that might support its claims to ethicality. But I have also drawn attention to some corresponding ways in which those claims might be undermined.

The first criterion that lends an ethical quality to organizational leadership concerns the moral sensitisation of the leader. If people in leadership positions care about morality and if they devote energy and resources to encouraging other people in their organizations to reflect on the moral implications of their actions, then they might be considered to be leading in a moral way. However, the uplifting quality of moral sensitisation is undermined if ethical judgement is thought of as being a straightforward and commonsensical affair. Moral sensitisation needs to be attentive to the intricacies of moral evaluation. The assumption that is implicit in the discourse of some research participants, and also in the work of some leadership commentators who seek to morally validate the leadership prescriptions that they offer, is that moral right and wrong are self-evident. The persistence of moral dilemmas and the actuality of moral disagreement testify to the mistakenness of this assumption. Moral evaluation is a contested, nuanced and complex affair. Unless morally sensitised leaders are alert to these intricacies then the agendas that they champion and the moral responsiveness that they evoke in their organizations may diminish, rather than encourage, morally legitimate outcomes. Morality is not simple and the processes that are put in place to address the moral dimension of organizational activities need to accommodate its ineluctable complexity.

A second way in which leadership can be morally uplifting is if leaders treat people in a consistent manner. However, the contestable nature of attributions of consistency must be acknowledged. What may seem like consistent treatment to one person may seem arbitrary to another. The morally legitimating force of consistency rests on an assumption of agreement. If attributions of consistency are delivered monologically, without reference to the recipients of supposedly consistent treatment, then that legitimating agreement is absent. While the notion of consistency has something important to say about not making a special case of the leader’s own interests or those of close associates, and thus offers an important
first principle of self-management, beyond this minimum it entails dialogical engagement. Furthermore, if leaders perceive the consistent application of principle as a purely rational undertaking, in which they can engage with a cool head and a hard heart, then they may miss some important indicators to the moral quality of their judgements. The signals sent by the emotions, our own and those of other people, may have something very important to tell us about ethics.

There also seems to be something intuitively right about leaders taking care of the organizations that they lead and thus looking after the interests of the people who depend upon those organizations. However, if the simple rule of maximising organizational good ends up undermining the interests of the very people that it is supposed to serve, then the rule should be ditched. Although the maximisation of organizational good may offer a practical and simple guide to ethical leadership in many cases, it should not be accorded such primacy that it occludes all other considerations. Moreover, leaders should remain alert to the hazards of a narrowly-defined altruism that privileges the interests of dependent stakeholders while potentially harming the more numerous groups of people who may be affected by the activities of their organization.

The moral allure of looking after their people also highlights the apparent worth of those leaders who show concern for their employees’ development. However that worth is diminished if leaders’ developmental attentions are driven more by instrumentality than by intrinsic care for their direct targets. On the other hand, it is enhanced if those employees are allowed to have their say about what does and what does not constitute worthwhile personal development. The morally uplifting propensity of participation in a common undertaking also seems to have something to say to a normative model of moral leadership. However, inflated claims of transformational bluster need to be balanced by sensitivity to the hazards of group commitment and by recognition that not everybody wants to participate or is able to participate in the supposedly self-actualising gift of transformation.

I have also noted, in this chapter, a tendency on the part of those leaders who I met to either take unilateral personal ownership of moral decision-making or to share that burden with a narrowly circumscribed group of social and professional peers. While it is encouraging that leaders care enough to take responsibility for morality, and also that their peers are willing to devote time to advising and discussing moral issues, this is problematic from whichever meta-ethical perspective it is viewed. It places unreasonable expectations of moral sagacity upon leaders and their peers; it rations the self-actualising gift of moral choice to the very few; and it breaks all the processual rules of discourse ethics. Furthermore, to keep morality
to themselves, or to include only a small and homogenous constituency in moral deliberation, can only exacerbate the tensions that I have already elaborated on.

On the other hand, the ethical up-sides that I have identified here are more likely to be achieved without their corresponding down-sides if shaded with the hue of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, broad and diverse consultation on the part of leaders will enhance the ethicality of leadership, not only from an intersubjectivist perspective but also from the meta-ethical stances of principle-based and existentialist ethics. Therefore, the involvement of implicated parties in consultative processes or, in the language of Habermasian ethics, the mediation of communicative action, seems to offer the most compelling normative template for ethical leadership. But, while intersubjectivism offers a normatively appealing leadership recipe, to what extent is it a realistic and practicable option for leaders of work organizations? I will conclude by considering this question.

The Practical Feasibility of Facilitative Leadership

Although intersubjective facilitation offers the most compelling normative model for ethical leadership, the disinclination of most of my research participants to adopt such a style and also the tendency of the leadership literature to encourage a more impositional approach might indicate its impracticability in real life organizational contexts. When confronted with the competitive exigencies and the pressured time frames of organizational bustle, even those leaders who are inclined towards consultation may feel compelled to take a more autocratic stance. Furthermore, popular expectations of leadership, perhaps reinforced by tales of heroic figures parachuting into organizations and single-handedly transforming their fortunes, are unlikely to encourage intersubjective mediators. If we hope for transformational crusaders, we are apt to be disappointed if our leaders assume the less dramatic posture of facilitation.

I will consider this issue from three different directions. I will begin by briefly reflecting again on what the leadership literature has to say about unilateralism and intersubjectivism. I will then consider the extent to which more general developments in the environment surrounding work organizations might be supportive of a facilitative leadership style. Lastly, I will say a few more words about the extent to which my own empirical research has indicated the feasibility of facilitative leadership.

I have already discussed, in my review of the leadership literature, the emergence of a human relations orientation in leadership studies. In other words, researchers have noted
that, in order to lead successfully, leaders should pay attention to the needs of followers. A "soft" approach to people is thus advocated, in contrast to the "hard", task-focussed approaches advocated elsewhere, particularly by some early trait theories. This softer, human relations-friendly trend is potentially supportive of a consultative leadership style, at least amongst employees. By stressing as it does the motivational benefits of shared ownership for decision-making, it establishes a link between dialogue and leadership effectiveness. The achievement of the performative outcomes with which leadership is more traditionally associated may thus require leaders to adopt a facilitative style that is conducive to ethicality.

However, I have also alluded to the hazard of relationship-orientation being regarded as just one leadership tool amongst many, to be taken out when specifically suited to a particular leader-defined project, but to be put firmly back in its box and replaced by the hammer of imposition once the moment for participation has passed. These apparently human relations-friendly leadership recipes are thus subject to the same criticism that has been levelled at the human relations movement more generally: that it is just another, rather more sophisticated, variant of scientific management (Parker: 2002); a fitting-up of different methods to different needs as directed by the efficiency-oriented principles of managerialist, organizational science. In this case, facilitative leadership is not likely to become an enduring feature of organizational leadership; it will be wheeled out only as and when leaders perceive the motivational need for some facilitative charm.

Then there is the problem that, by casting participation as no more than a motivational leadership tool, the impression of involvement takes on more significance than its actuality. It is enough for people to feel that they are listened to by leaders; whether or not leaders actually take any notice of them is immaterial. There is a danger that superficial, "stage managed" employee voice practices (Dundon et al 2004), which are aimed purely at engendering a sense of belonging amongst employees but which have no real impact on decision-making, will take precedence over genuine attempts to access and respond to diverse perspectives. Therefore, even theoretical spurs to dialogue may be imbued with a patriarchal undertone: an assumption that leaders know what’s best for us all but that they must generate an illusion of inclusion in order to generate support for their predisposed, self-defined and morally self-audited mission.

So the emphasis that researchers place on human-relations sensitivity is not necessarily supportive of intersubjectivist leadership. On the one hand, those researchers who draw attention to the link between consultation and effectiveness may at least make it permissible
for people in formal leadership roles who are naturally disposed to a consultative approach to indulge their proclivity. If aspiring leaders are told by leadership educators that it is OK to involve people, then perhaps the natural facilitators will shine through. They may even make it to the very top instead of being shuffled off into “female ghettos” (Marshall, 1995: 16), such as middle-ranking HR management positions, while the impositional, masculine crusaders take up their seats around board table. However, given the weight of expectation upon leaders to conform to managerialist stereotypes, it is hard to envisage a tide of intersubjectively facilitation being driven from the pages of the leadership literature in the foreseeable future.

If leadership theory does not inspire greater intersubjective responsiveness amongst leaders, then perhaps legislative pressure will. In this respect, recent EU-driven, employment-related law offers some encouraging signs. European Works Council Regulations encourage transnational organizations to communicate with their employees, while the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations have extended this requirement to all organizations above a certain size. Although these regulations are only aimed at involving employees and do nothing to engender communication with wider groups of affected stakeholders, they at least offer a potential antidote to the general disinclination, which I encountered during empirical research, to communicate outside the inner sanctum of senior management.

However, early indications are that these measures are doing little to enhance communication between top management and employees. This is partly because caution on the part of employers and trade unions is impeding their implementation (Hall 2005; CIPD 2007). It must also be due to the relatively toothless nature of the legislation, the application of which works on the assumption that all is well with an organization’s communication processes unless employees rock the boat. Since few employees, particularly in non-unionised settings, are likely to even be aware of the regulations, such challenges to organizational equilibrium seem unlikely. And as for business leaders grasping this legislation as an opportunity to improve the quality of their communication procedures, the response that I personally encountered upon making this suggestion to one particular board of directors might be indicative of a more general attitude. That response is summed up by the CEO’s comment that this would involve “meetings just for meetings sake”. The notion that there may be some moral or practical benefit to be gained from seeking the views of employees escaped him.
So although human relations-oriented leadership theory, the growing interest in employee voice that characterises practitioner and academic HRM literature (Dundon et al 2004) and recent legislation have the potential to be supportive of the normative model of ethical leadership that I have developed here, there is some way to go before that potential is realised. There is, however, another aspect of the contemporary organization landscape that might encourage intersubjective responsiveness. This is the general rise in CSR-consciousness amongst the business community. Increasingly, corporate leaders are coming to terms with the reality that, in order to be commercially successful, they need to respond to the expectations of their key stakeholders. And as concern about business’s environmental and social performance grows amongst customers, employees and shareholders, so business leaders must attend to their profile in these areas. The overwhelming tide of “ethical” public relations initiatives undertaken by businesses and the amount of space on corporate websites devoted to headings such as “social accountability” and “sustainability” are testimony to the seriousness with which this subject is currently treated in the corridors of corporate power.

It might be said that there is a sort of hidden hand of intersubjectivity at play here: that business leaders’ interest in maximising profit necessarily engenders stakeholder responsiveness; that if leaders to not respond to the wishes of stakeholders, those stakeholders will vote with their feet and take their support elsewhere. Battalions of corporate social responsibility consultants are therefore engaged, as intersubjective mediators, to identify the present, and second-guess the future, ethical expectations of stakeholders so that CEOs and MDs can direct the activities of their businesses accordingly.

However, even if we assume that business leaders actually do what they say they do in their ethically-inclined public relations pronouncements, which is by no means certain, this commercially self-interested, intersubjective responsiveness is seriously flawed in another respect. This is that, in responding primarily to the expectations of what I have referred to earlier as instrumental normative stakeholders, business leaders overlook the views of a far broader constituency. Instrumental normative stakeholding may evoke responsiveness to those stakeholders who have a significant influence on a business’s fortunes. These are likely to include institutional shareholders, key customers and those employees who are fortunate enough to possess rare and sought-after skills. It does little to encourage leaders to offer an audience to anybody else. This is a democratic responsiveness in which the most influential get the most votes; the rest are not even allowed into the polling station.
It seems, then, that these aspects of the general organizational landscape are no more likely to foment intersubjective responsiveness on the part of organizational leaders than is the theory of leadership. But what of my own research; what indicators did this offer that an intersubjectivist leadership style might be feasible in organizations? Here, two findings are immediately apparent. The first is that Roger, the one person who embodies most closely the Mediator of Communication ideal type, works for a public sector organization. The second is that those who come closest to Roger in articulating intersubjective responsiveness have left their corporate leadership careers behind them in order to take up occupations that are more in keeping with their ethical commitments.

Now, the fact that the person who expresses most strongly the intersubjectivist ethic works as CEO for a large rural county council might be interpreted as an indication that public sector organizations are more likely to be supportive of intersubjectively ethical leadership than are private sector organizations. This is not a conclusion that I seek to draw: my intention in this PhD was to explore organizational leadership more generally and I did not set out to make distinctions between sectors. Furthermore, additional research amongst public sector leaders would be required to support such a contention. However, developments that have taken place since my meeting with Roger might actually indicate a contrary conclusion. Six months after our meeting, I read in a local paper that Roger had been asked to take early retirement. This request was in response to the findings of an enquiry into allegations of mismanagement in the council. The enquiry had found evidence of “poor management of both organizational and individual performance” along with “extensive delegation when tighter controls in some corporate areas were needed”. The report recommended that management of performance needed to be more robust, underpinned with clear, realistic and understandable policies and procedures for staff, with discipline that holds them to account. Furthermore, it found that “senior managers of the council could have acted to exercise a greater degree of control over events” and that “corporate checks and balances were not robustly applied”. It seems that Roger may have been too intersubjectively responsive for the liking of his political masters. At least in this case, rather than public sector organizations supporting intersubjective responsiveness, the opposite may be the case: that the public sector is as covetous of directive, controlling leadership as is the private sector.

As far as the leavers are concerned, that they have left their corporate leadership roles behind in order to take up what they consider to be more socially responsible careers may well indicate that leading in the normatively ethical manner that I have developed here is not easy. This does not indicate that those who continue to occupy the roles of power and
influence in organizations are necessarily immoral people. However, it probably says something about the nature of the organizational environment, and perhaps also about the affect that it has on people who ascend to its positions of pre-eminence. This point is well articulated by one of these leavers. I recounted his words in my empirical report and it seems appropriate to repeat them here:

I don't come across many people in my walk of life who I would think are, you know, the forces of evil and darkness. Most people I come across and talk to, once they get out of their corporate straightjackets, as far as they wear them, they seem to be pretty decent people with their hearts in the right place and a value system that seems by and large to be very honourable. ... I think the difficulty ... of people who have influence ... then reverts to: how open do they remain, once they get to these positions of power and influence, to a whole range of influence from fairly ordinary people? And my experience, so far, is that they don’t remain very open to that, not because they don’t wish to but because they just move in some very rarefied circles and you can only spend your time once. And they’re quite used to spending it with movers and shakers; people who have influence; in very protected environments. And the impact of day-to-day drudgery and the ordinary lives are, sort of, taken away by flunkies and money.

A Need for Leadership in the Field of Ethical Leadership

So, where does this leave us with regard to ethical leadership? Having developed a normative model of ethical leadership I have suggested that the actual implementation of such an approach in work organizations is likely to be beset with difficulties. What are we to make of this gloomy prognosis?

Perhaps the conclusion that this leaves us with is that if leadership is to be ethical, then leadership is needed in the field of ethical leadership. Leadership theorists are inclined to emphasise the willingness of leaders to challenge convention; to swim against the tide; to question accepted practices; to oppose the status-quo. Well, in that case, it seems that if leaders are to lead ethically, then they need to challenge conventional expectations of leadership; they need to lead leadership. Managerialist convention may well call upon leaders to make unequivocal, self-assured pronouncements of right and wrong; to stand apart from emotional engagement in order to apply principle in a cool-headed and dispassionate manner; to uphold the survival and prosperity of their organizations as an absolute moral imperative; to cast themselves as the arbiters of employees best interests; and to impose their monologically defined transformational visions on their followers. But if convention demands all of these things, then leadership in the field of moral leadership
calls for challenge to this conventional understanding. If convention expects a directive, impositional stance of leaders, if it calls upon leaders to consult only amongst a privileged cabal of like-minded social and professional peers, then those who seek to lead in the field of ethical leadership need to challenge that convention. They must dare to be different. If the ethical quality of leadership is, as I have concluded here, distinguished by intersubjective responsiveness, then ethical leaders need to show leadership by challenging conventional, managerialist expectations of autocratic or oligarchic imposition in order to champion the role of intersubjective facilitator.

If leadership is to play a part, not just in achieving the performative outcomes that are so widely revered in the organizational world, but in actually making that world a morally better place, then perhaps what is needed is not just more of the same but a different type of leadership; a type of leadership which challenges the managerialist presuppositions that characterise most of the leadership literature. Maybe the clamour for leadership that, as I noted in my introduction, seems to be enveloping our society is misguided. It is looking for the wrong thing. Instead of awaiting crusading, charismatic champions who will single-handedly show us the way to a better world, we ought to be looking for another sort of hero altogether. As existentialist ethics suggests, we should be looking to investigate the capacity that resides within each of us to find that better world. That quest will necessarily be enhanced through processes of critical reflection and principle-based ethics, for its part, offers a range of perspectives that might facilitate those reflective processes. But as intersubjectivist ethics suggests, we should seek to do this as a communicative endeavour. So what we need in our leaders is not assertive self-assurance but the mediation and facilitation skills that will enable that communicative endeavour.
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Appendix I

Sample Empirical Research Discussion Guide

Participant: Nigel Brown (Chief Executive of Anytown Building Society)

Date: 22.05.07 – 12.00
Phone number: 0845 XXXXXX
Name of PA: Jane Dobson

Introduction

1. Explain objective of research.
2. Outline approach.
3. Purpose of interviews.

Leadership and morality

1. Do you think about the moral dimension of organisational leadership?
2. Does it present any particular moral challenges?

Responsibilities

1. Who to?
2. Prioritisation?
3. Reasons for?
4. Conflicts?
5. Examples?

People

1. How would you describe your feelings towards those people who report to you?
2. Does the leader-follower relationship mean that you feel differently towards them than towards other people?
3. How does that impact on the way that you relate to them?
4. Is this instrumentally or emotionally driven?
5. Does it create any particular responsibilities?
6. Why?
7. Any examples?

Building support for collective agenda

1. Is it important?
2. Example?
3. Does it bother you when people don’t support the common agenda?
4. How do you resolve such situations?
5. Examples?
6. Should leaders influence the values of others?
7. Examples?
8. What about responding to the values of others?
9. Examples?
Evolution of personal values

1. Where do they come from?
2. Formative influencers or experiences?
3. Examples?

Impact of the organisational leadership role on personal morality

1. Has your morality changed?
2. If so, why?
3. Impact of seniority?
4. Examples?

Change

1. Do you agree that leaders are change agents?
2. Change making affects lots of people – does that trouble you?
3. How do you morally justify the negative impacts?
4. Examples?
5. Input from others?
6. Input from subordinates?
7. How/why not?

Dilemmas

1. Describe one?
2. Responsibilities/principles/values at stake?
3. Decision-making process?
4. Involvement of others – did you seek it?
5. Impact on your decision-making?
6. Was decision entirely within your remit?
7. How would other people have responded if you had decided otherwise?
8. How would you resolve that dilemma now? Would different factors impact on your decision, would they be weighted differently?
9. Looking back, do you feel that that you made the right decision?

Review
Appendix 2
Sample Introductory Letter to Research Participant

[Printed on to Loughborough University Business School letter headed paper with researcher’s contact details added]

30 March 2007

Nigel Brown
Chief Executive
Anytown Building Society
PO Box XX,
Richman Street
Anytown
XY10 1WX

Dear Nigel,

I am writing to ask for your assistance with PhD research that I am undertaking in association with Loughborough University Business School.

The subject of my PhD is the relationship between organisational leadership and morality. Although the subject of leadership has been extensively researched, relatively little attention has been paid to the ethical questions raised by the leadership undertaking. I hope that my PhD thesis will contribute to reflection on those questions. To assist with my research, I am keen to gather input from people who hold, or who have held, formal leadership roles in large organisations. I would therefore be extremely grateful if you could spare an hour or so to meet me and discuss this subject.

My aim in meeting you would be to gain an insight into how you think about the ethical challenges presented by the organisational leadership role. I am particularly keen to gain an understanding of how you think about morality, how you approach moral dilemmas and the extent to which the organisational leadership context supports or constrains you in doing what you consider to be right. This will include exploring the principles and decision-making criteria to which you appeal when confronting moral dilemmas.

If you are able to help with this matter, I can meet you wherever is convenient for you. I am based near Mitown, so I can easily travel to Yortown. Alternatively, I could meet you at any other venue. We would need to meet somewhere fairly quiet as I would like to record our discussion.

I would expect our meeting to last for about one hour, although I would be grateful for any time that you can spare. I would like to be able to use quotes from the transcript of our discussion in my research report. I will, however, maintain strict anonymity in doing so. Although I would like to mention in my report the nature of your leadership position and the type of organisation you have worked in, I will mask any references to specific people or specific organisations.

Many thanks for taking the time to consider my request. I will call you in a few days to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Mick Fryer