Emotions and Ethical Decision Making: Literature Review and Research Agenda

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Abstract

Traditionally, ethical decision making is perceived as a rational and cognitive process by academicians and researchers. The contemporary authors have linked emotions to ethical decision making (EDM) and integrated the concept with organisational decision-making in a business setup. This literature review attempts to contribute to the ongoing discussion on consumer ethics by conducting an exhaustive and in-depth analysis of 32 papers that were published in 14 journals between the years 2001 and 2021. The objective of this conceptual paper is to investigate the empirical evidence for the role of emotion in EDM in business organisations. Theoretical frameworks provide for the synthesis of the influence of emotions on the cognitive process, although reflections of the processing of emotions in the EDM process is not so clearly evident by practitioners in organisations.

Keywords: Emotions, Ethical decision making, business ethics, organisational research

Introduction

Over the past two decades emotional dimension in ethical decision making (EDM) have received considerable scholarly interest as an important area of research in organisational theory.The emerging areas of literature is investigating the role of emotions as an integral element on decision making interactions and consequences (Mittal and Ross, 1998; Raghunathan and Pham ,1999; Connoly and Zeelenberg, 2002; Pham, Lee and Stephen , 2012) in different aspects of management settings. This includes the psychological traits of decision

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makers and how various types of emotions affect their ethical judgement. As put forth by Koporcic et al. (2017) : "…emotions are a natural part of the business world and they do not need to be avoided or restricted, but understood and managed accordingly."(p.436).

Several important conceptual theories support emotional aspect of ethical decision making research in business. Recent researches have evolve decision-making as conscious, rational systematic process (e.g., Kohlberg 1994) and established that ethical judgements are emotion-based and automatic (Haidt, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007; George and Dane 2011). However, extant theories have ignored emotions as a possible dimension of ethical decision-making and need arises for the incorporation besides review related to the influence of emotional aspect in business ethics research. In recent years, management scholars have integrated emotions as non-rational antecedents and predictors of moral judgement and ethical decision-making in organisations (Haidt 2001, Dedeke 2015, Schwartz 2016). Recently, Business ethics researchers have theorized and proposed an integrated framework of cognitive-emotive mode of EDM (Vitell et al 2013).

Overall, emotions and organisational decision-making processes and consequences interplay with each other in the managerial context. However, recent systematic review of literature of examining factors influencing EDM has revealed the emergence of emotions as one of the under investigated factor. Craft (2013) summarised the research findings from eighty four articles on ethical decision-making from 2004 to 2011. The researcher identified only seven empirical studies examining emotions/mood as dependent variable with judgement (3), and intent (4) as constructs influencing ethical decision in organisations. In another recent study, Casali and Perano (2020) adopted a qualitative approach to highlight the process made over the past four decades in investigating factors influencing DM. Among the 42 potentially influencing factors provided in the paper on EDM, the researchers identified emotions/mood as understudied variable (less than 32 papers) but found to be influential and slightly significant (upto 50%-75%). The recommended future empirical research to be done to understand the possible relationships among various unobserved factors to improve decision making capabilities of managers.

Specifically, EDM has remained an area of research in the last forty years and factors that potentially influence EDM has been systematically investigated and published. To the best of our knowledge, none of the studies has taken a systematic literature assessment of the effects

of emotions on the EDM of managers in spite of the increasing interest in the topic. This paper draws upon existing literature to consolidate the empirical findings of interrelations of an emotive process for managerial ethical decision-making and understand practical implications. There has not been a literature review that has synthesised the conceptual and empirical research of the influence of emotions and EDM. This paper aims to investigate the scholarly investigation of the influence of emotions in the managerial context within business organisations and contribute to further theoretical development.

The primary purpose of the paper is to review the empirical research examining the influence of emotions on EDM using a Literature Approach. In addition, research studies investigating emotions as moderating variables and their effects on EDM of managers are also included as a secondary purpose of the study.

Research Questions:

RQ 1: What are the various emotions studied in the context of managerial decision-making?
RQ 2: How do emotions influence managerial ethical decision-making?
RQ 3: How do different emotions influence EDM as a potential moderator factor?

As a result, this study provides a comprehensive perspective by including research that is relevant to both the streams of emotions and the ethics of business. The following are some of the ways in which this review adds to the existing corpus of knowledge on organisational ethics. It provides a summary of the theoretical foundation that may be found in the literature, then it describes the procedures for gathering the data and consequent variables that were investigated in business ethics research related to emotions. The remaining parts of the paper are organised as follows. In the next section, the research methodology is discussed followed by findings related to empirical studies done in the last two decades. the last section. In the end, we make conclusions and summarise our findings.

2. Research Methodology

The search for papers started with keyword themes (emotions or feel* or affect*) in the article title, abstract and / or keywords by focussing our research in the areas of management, psychology, decision sciences, economics and finance. Initially, the search string resulted in thousands of articles including word 'affect' and 'feel' , since they were used as working verbs. Since the focus was on the review of emotion in EDM of managers, the term 'ethical

decision making' (with or without a hypen) and 'organisation' was searched within the content of the articles. Finally, the search string used "Emotion" AND "Ethical decision making" of the organisations in the business context.

Inclusion: English Language, Only peer-reviewed and academic journals, Only Empirical results studies published

Exclusion: Articles published in conferences, proceedings, or book chapters or unpublished research studies; consumer emotions, research articles related to Medicine, Neuroscience, Clinical Psychology, and Nursing; theoretical and conceptual papers

In the present study, only those articles were included on emotions and EDM explicitly focussing on managerial/ organisational decision making context published since 2001 till 2021.

3. Findings and Analysis

In the past twenty years , the field of research of the repercussion of emotions on decision making in organisations has grown rapidly. A number of publications have organised and analysed theoretical and empirical work of emotions on judgement and EDM (Kupers & Weibler, 2008; Angie, 2011, George & Dane, 2016). Traditional research on business decision making has helped to identify broader areas of emotions such as integral, incidental, specific and discrete and its influence on ethical judgement and decisions (Lerner et al., 2015).

3.1 Emotions and Ethical Decision Making

Table 1 shows the number and type of emotions studied over the last two decades and the key findings in these empirical studies. In recent decades, emotion as the affective state has been increasingly investigated in decision-making, and it is a powerful generator of judgment and decision-making processes (Lerner et al., 2015). Emotions are known to impact judgments (Crane et al., 2017), lessen cognitive focus (Garfinkel et al., 2016), and impair cognitive processing (Kusev et al., 2017). These studies show that emotional distress can result in the reinterpretation of problematic situations leading to illogical behaviour and incidental influence over other decisions. Keltner and Lerner (2010) model of emotion-based decision making model reflects the emerging acknowledgement of the significance of emotion in decision-making. The combination of cognitive and motivational pathways, according to this paradigm,

determines whether emotions improve or degrade judgment and decision-making. Higgs et al (2020) have examined the influence of cognitive emotions like guilt and embarrassment on EDM. The discrete emotions have positive or negative effects in reasoning strategies for decision ethicality and sense-making processes. The various participants were induced to scenarios related to shame, guilt and embarrassment emotion thereby their perception of moral intensity was measured. Results showed the negative impact of these emotions on cognitive reappraisal of situations and emotional interventions. Another study by Motrod et al (2018) purported the connection of anger and guilt on unethical judgements using dual process theory. The findings indicate that guilt reduces unethical behaviour and anger aggravates it by impulsive processing mechanisms of cognitive reasoning.

TABLE 1 : Analysis of Studies by Type of Emotion

Sr.no.	Citation	Year of Study	No. of Emotion studied	Type of Emotion	Key Findings
1	Kugler, Noussair, & Hatch.	2021	1	Disgust	Disgust has no effect on ethical decision making.
2	Jayawardena-Willis, Pio, & McGhee.	2021	5	Divine States	Love, Compassion, Joy influences ethical decisions made by managers.
3	Zolotoy, O'Sullivan, Seo, & Veeraraghavan.	2021		Positive Affect	Companies invest more in corporate social responsibility when their corporate headquarters have positive high morale.

4	Higgs, McIntosh, Connelly, & Mumford.	2020	3	Guilt, Shame , Embarrassment	Various emotions are associated negatively with cognitive reasoning and reappraisal.
5	Jeong, Sun, & Fu.	2020	14	Moral Emotion ,Hedonic emotion	Moral emotions are more associated with EDM. Business school education affects the relationship between emotions and EDM.
6	Chen,Treviño, & Humphrey.	2020	2	Anger, Sympathy	Sympathetic and angry emotional expressions of ethical people increased ethical decision ethicality but anger was disliked.
7	McIntosh, Higgs, Turner, Partlow, Steele, MacDougall, ... & Mumford.	2019	In general	Positive and negative , Active and passive emotions	The negative impact of stressors often adversely affect rational thinking and barrier to effective whistleblowing.
8	Diochon & Nizet.	2019	in general	Self and for others	Emotional awareness, ethical decision-making, and unraveling, emotional (dis)engagement suggest existence of Emotions and ethical reflection.
9	Motro, Ordóñez, Pittarello,& Welsh.	2018	2	Discrete emotions, Anger Guilt	Unethical actions are intensified by anger, but they are lessened by guilt. Both impulsive and deliberate thought

					processes mediated these results.
10	Bonner, Greenbaum & Quade .	2017	3	Shame, Guilt , Embarrassmen t	Findings point to a strong positive correlation between unethical actions and feelings of shame. Managers have the power to shape their subordinates' responses to their unethical activities.
11	Baker, D. F.	2017	1	Empathy	Empathetic concerns for self and others is important in ethical situations .
12	Noval, L. J.	2016	2	Happiness , Disappoinment	indicated that the anticipated emotional effects of desired outcomes did not affect task performance. Based on a biased emotional influence, people try to enrich themselves unethically and selfishly.
13	Johnson, & Connelly.	2016	2	Guilt , Shame	shows high guilt mitigates the unfavourable association between moral disengagement and EDM, while low guilt

					does not. Moral disengagement and EDM are unaffected by shame.
14	Guzak, J. R.	2015	10+10=20	Positve Affect, Negative Affect	Making moral choices while feeling negative alters the decision-making process in ways that aren't seen when people are feeling happy or neutral.
15	Winterich, Morales & Mittal.	2015	3	Disgust, happiness, sadness	Disgust and sadness have distinct moderating effects, but disgust and happiness have minimal efficacy.
16	Fida, Paciello, Tramontano, Fontaine, Barbaranelli,& Farnese.	2015	17	Negative	greater moral disengagement and enactment of CWB occurred when workers experienced more negative emotions in response to stressors.
17	Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato & Keltner.	2015	1 and 4 others	Awe	The presence of awe prompted a rise in morality. The impact of the awe induction on moral judgement was moderated by the individual's sense of modesty.

18	Celuch, Saxby & Oeding.	2015	2	Regret,	The expected regret from an unethical decision affected subjects' judgement and influence ethical decision-making.
19	Zhu, Y.	2015		Qing(Positive emotions), Love and compassion	This study showed the importance of love and compassion based on Confucian ideals. Qing fosters morals and virtue.
20	Dietz & Kleinlogel.	2014	1	Empathy	Empathy had a modestly unfavourable impact on their intention to reduce salaries. (unethical be both empathy and guilt influence the ethical attitudes that were measured in this study behaviour).
21	McCool & Bremser.	2014	3 types of subscale of disgust	Disgust	Findings give support to the argument that moral outrage over impurity is not the only context in which disgust is experienced.
22	Celuch, & Saxby.	2013	3	Negative	Negative anticipatory emotions and intentions linked with unethical behaviour are found to be considerably impacted by an experiment aimed to induce a counterfactual thought.

23	Ghorbani, Liao, Çayköylü, & Chand.	2013	2	Shame, Guilt	shame and Guilt mediates the reparative behaviour in doingbethically good.
24	Agnihotri,Rapp, Kothandaraman , & Singh.	2012	2	Empathy, Guilt	both empathy and guilt influence the ethical attitudes that were measured in this study.
25	Shapiro,Jazaieri , & Goldin.	2012	20	State and Trait Anxiety, Positive and Negative Affects	Mindfulness is associated with moral reasoning, EDM and emotional well being.
26	Krishnakumar, & Rymph.	2012	2	Anger, Sadness	Results demonstrated that lower ethical decision-making happened with increased negative emotions. Persons with a high EI are better able to deal with their feelings, which may lead to their making more moral choices.
27	Sekerka, Godwin, & Charnigo	2012	5P,5N	Positive, Negative	Managers who practised BEI reported feeling less dejected and less need for constant reassurance and praise.
28	Zhong, C. B.	2011	12	12 Emotional States	Respondents who lie expressed higher levels of discomfort feelings such as contempt,

					anxiety, and unhappiness, which are prevalent after moral transgressions.
29	Thiel,Connelly, & Griffith.	2011	20 item - 10 positive 10 negative	State affect positive Negative	Certainty drives the unfavourable association between anger and EDM. Certainty appraisals increased ED M and its processes more than goal obstacle evaluations.
30	Curtis, M. B.	2006	2	Affect exam and Affect comparing	Negative mood was connected with fewer intentions to report unethical behaviour to a superior in the organisation. Emotional judgments explain ethical discrepancies.
31	Connelly, Helton-Fauth, & Mumford,	2004	P-16,N-18	Positive and negative	Emotions have a stronger relationship to interpersonally directed ethical choices. Both positive and negative trait emotions relate to ethical choices. Active emotions showed stronger relationships with EDM.

					Emotions were found to have crucial role in EDM and during the ethical reasoning process, as when a feeling of guilt leads the decision maker away from or towards certain courses of action.
32	Bartlett, D.	2003	In general	Affect	

Source : Author's compilation Work

3.2 Role of Emotions in Organisational DM

Emotions have become a popular area of study in organizational behaviour ethics, which broadens the rationalist view to include impulsive processing of thoughts. Over the years, scholars have examined the direct influence of specific emotions on ethical judgments related to business settings. The research of Winterich et al. (2015) on the role of happiness, disgust, and sadness states of mind shows the impact of an experienced emotional state on the severity of individuals' ethical judgments. Another breakthrough was a study conducted by Fida et al. (2015) on understanding aggression and other negative emotions using counterproductive work behaviour (cwb). The responses elicited from 1147 respondents supported the moral disengagement of employees due to negative emotions being experienced during stressful situations in the work environment. The employees behaviour such as abuse, theft, defiance in response to negative situations at work place was empirically examined by Kiewitz et al (2016). 297 employees responded to stressful scenarios and their emotional responses were measured to understand coping strategy and beliefs of the employees. Another study examined how guilt as an emotion influences restorative behaviour , beliefs for negative events such as tax evasion (Dunn et al., 2018). The findings have implications for tax policy to encourage tax disclosures as guilt is recognised as an emotion to corrective behaviour to ethical action. Moreover, there is a dearth of research connecting shame and embarrassment to moral judgment. The cognitively-based approach to ethical decision-making, which holds that emotion can be counterproductive to rational processes of

decision-making, is at odds with the findings of these studies, which show that a lack of emotion during an ethical situation can hinder ethical decision-making.

4. Implications and Future Research

In a sense that is more applicable to real life, the findings that have been presented here have implications for managers, who undoubtedly will have interactions with subordinates or co-workers who are going through emotional states. It indicates that managers should be cognizant of the feelings experienced by others associated with them and consider how they may act due to differences in processing that are produced by those emotions as they engage with various stakeholders. This does not imply that businesses should try to elicit specific processes or responses from their employees by provoking particular emotions in their coworkers. Instead, managers should focus on evaluating the feelings that are already being experienced by others and effectively working through those feelings if they appear to be problematic (Higgs et al., 2020). According to the findings presented here, managers should employ reappraisal techniques and competencies in emotion regulation. This is due to the fact that cognitive reappraisal tends to have a detrimental effect on decision-making when it is presented in framework of a complicated ethical circumstance.

Researchers should further investigate the fundamental basis of emotion, EDM and moral magnitude, and not restricted to the causal assertions about these characteristics. Theoretically, the findings of the current research provide an understanding into the distinctive characteristics of numerous self-conscious emotions along with their varied consequences on ethical judgments. More research needs to be undertaken to collect data on the impacts of guilt, regret, and embarrassment concerning morality, affect modulation, and ethics. Furthermore, limited study has been conducted on the specific feelings of shame, embarrassment demonstrating a link to ethical decision-making. Studies further suggest that being indifferent during an ethical situation results in hindered EDM. This contradicts being aware, cognitively-based approach of EDM, which contends that emotion may be counterproductive to rational processes of decision-making. Future research could try to build on these findings by evaluating other emotions that possibly be associated

to EDM (disgust, greed, empathy), as well as exploring the EDM of persons people who are possibly less prone to developing affective reactions.

Additional studies on techniques for emotion control and the expression of distinct emotions in response to a variety of challenging circumstances should help managers evaluate which techniques to employ and under what conditions. To build on these results, future studies could examine the ethical judgments of people who are less likely to experience affect on a regular basis, as well as investigate other emotions that may be associated to decision-making ethics, such as contempt and empathy. Due to the limits of the research that has been done so far, it is important that more research be done to find out what causes feelings, moral reasoning, and levels of moral conviction.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the current study offer evidence of the influence that particular emotions have on the process of making ethical decisions. The Greek philosopher Plato believed that while emotions are a fundamental part of our minds, they are not particularly helpful. He suggested that we visualize our thoughts as a chariot drawn by two horses, one of which is noble and submissive (moral feelings) and the other is wild and unruly (primal emotions), with the charioteer representing human reason and the two horses representing various emotional states. Aristotle believed that one's emotions reveal one's personality and that virtuous person will feel and experience their emotions at the appropriate times. Scottish philosopher David Hume claimed that logic is subservient to emotion and that feelings should always come first. Since our emotions (the chariot) are being pushed along without any control over a charioteer (the mind), our reasoning is driven by them. Consequently, the power is in the hands of the horses, or our emotions.The current study's findings have important significance for understanding how different emotions and their control have an influence on the ethical decision-making process in organisations. In accordance with the various findings of this study, cognitive reappraisal results in a detrimental impact on ethically challenging decision-making situations. (Johnson and Connelly 2016) To be more specific, the findings show that reassessing one's feelings may not always be beneficial when it comes to making decisions during complex situations and explore research areas for further investigation into this topic.

Research on EDM has primarily focused on Rest's (1986) framework, which is a rational and conscious model of ethical decision-making. Nevertheless, the literature on EDM has contributed relatively less studies in human cognition that suggests a dual-processing framework based on both rational and affective components. After reviewing the research on dual processing, it appears that affect could be a significant component in decision-making within the situational or the contextual frame of the situation. This is because making ethical decisions is a serious and complex undertaking. Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts urged us to understand our drives as being motivated by unconscious desires and inclinations. Recent neuroscience research has demonstrated the impact of unconscious bias on our beliefs, reasoning, and judgements. This raises the question of whether the notion that reason and passion are opposing forces is correct. Another school of thought contends that our emotions are a component of our reasoning. They represent our opinions on how the world is and how we would like it to be. Are we the helpless captives of our emotions? Is it something we decide on? Our response will help us assess how we feel about moral judgements, ethical decisions and how responsible we are at our workplace. Early models of emotions have viewed affect and emotions as a component of the analytical cognition process based on arousal and valence (Russell's affect model, 1980; Pfister and Bohm, 2008). However, much of the recent research has focused on underlying discrete emotions (anger, fear, sadness) and how cognitive tasks (decision-making) are influenced by various kinds of emotions (such as integral, incidental, specific and others) to choose a particular course of action (Hastie 2001; Lerner et al. 2015). For this reason, we need to understand the current body of literature and the underlying links between emotions and EDM for further knowledge development.

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