

Ethical Decision Making in Organizations: The Role of Empathy

Emmanuelle Patricia Kleinlogel

Joerg Dietz

Faculty of Business and Economics

Faculty of Business and Economics

University of Lausanne

University of Lausanne

Bâtiment Internef

Bâtiment Internef

1015 Lausanne-Dorigny

1015 Lausanne-Dorigny

Switzerland

Switzerland

Tel.: +41 21 692 34 50

E-mail: [emmanuelle.kleinlogel@unil.ch](mailto:emmanuelle.kleinlogel@unil.ch)

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### Ethical Decision Making in Organizations: The Role of Empathy

For a long time, organizational theory focused on rational decision making processes, and on “how organizations systemize, rationalize, routinize, and bureaucratize human action in an attempt to strip away or control emotion that might interfere with rationality” (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006, p. 61). However, as pointed out by Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe (2008), emotions are critical for ethical decision making because they help to “draw our attention to moral issues and highlight the moral imperative in situations” (p. 575) (see also Damasio, 1994; Gaudine & Thorne, 2001). Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012) present the emotion of empathy in particular as crucial for organizational functioning and decision making because it fosters connectedness between organizational members and creates cooperative relationships and ethicality.

In this chapter, we propose to review when empathy facilitates and when it undermines ethical decision making. On the one hand, we propose that empathy plays a positive role in ethical decision making through the empathy-altruism hypothesis (e.g., Batson, 2008) and through the lens of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). On the other hand, we also propose that empathy can lead individuals to make poor decisions via biased decision making processes.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, we define the concept of empathy. Then, we will discuss the processes that underlie a positive effect of empathy on ethical decision making, followed by processes that explain a negative effect of empathy on ethicality in decision making (see Figure 1 for an illustration of these processes). We conclude by discussing the implications of empathy in decision making processes and the limitations of the current research on empathy.

### **Definition of Empathy**

The concept of empathy is defined as “an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need” (Batson, 2008, p. 8). An empathetic response entails two interrelated processes, a cognitive one and an emotional one (e.g., Batson, 2008). The cognitive process is activated by an arousal. In the case of empathy, the cognitive process is set off when an individual observes or interacts with a person in need. It consists in adopting the perspective of the person by imagining “how the person in need is affected by his or her situation” (Batson & Shaw, 1991, p. 112). Empathy then entails an emotional response encompassing feelings such as “sympathy, compassion, tenderness, and the like” (Batson, 2008, p. 8). Empathy has been considered as both a state (e.g., Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981; Stocks, Lishner, & Decker, 2009) and a trait (e.g., Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008; Duan & Hill, 1996; Verhaert & Van den Poel, 2010). Next, we review how empathy can positively affect ethical decision making.

### **The Positive Side of Empathy in Ethical Decision Making**

#### **Theoretical Arguments**

##### **The social psychological view of empathy.**

According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathy leads individuals to engage in helping behaviours towards a person in need in order to relieve that need. Research has shown that this behaviour is primarily driven by a concern to assist persons in distress and not by egoistic needs (see Batson, 2008, for a review). Batson and his colleagues conducted numerous studies in support of this hypothesis. For instance, they found that the behaviours of empathic individuals were not motivated by (1) a need to reduce one’s own distress or negative state (e.g., Batson et al., 1981;

Batson et al., 1989; Dovidio, Allem, & Schroeder, 1990), (2) rewards (e.g., Batson et al., 1991), (3) concerns about negative social evaluations (e.g., Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, & Varey, 1986), or (4) similarity to the person in need (Batson, Lishner, Cook, & Sawyer, 2005).

Furthermore, empirical evidence has shown that empathy as a trait predicts altruistic behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 1999). In a meta-analysis, Eisenberg and Miller (1987) reported that trait empathy generally was associated with pro-social and related behaviours. More recently, Verhaert and Van den Poel (2010) found a relationship between empathic concern and donation decisions.

### **The moral virtue view of empathy.**

Drawing on the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathy is considered as a moral virtue and a human strength for organizations. Through the lenses of positive psychology (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational scholarship (e.g., Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), the fundamental position of the “empathy as a virtue” approach is that empathy motivates human behaviour that creates positive consequences for other people and stakeholders.

Empathy is considered as “the greatest contributor in strengthening social interaction through its ability to motivate individuals to cooperate, to share resources and to help others” (Pavlovich & Krahnke, 2012, p. 131). For instance, empathy-based behaviour is perceived as enhancing compassion and connectedness through altruistic behaviour within organizations (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Pavlovich & Krahnke, 2012). Empathy can therefore be said to motivate a collaborative rather than a competitive mindset. In addition, empathy also leads individuals to consider different points of view before they make decisions. They take the perspective of different stakeholders and consider the possible consequences of

different scenarios. In the next section, we review empirical evidence relative to the positive effect of empathy on ethical decision making, starting with our experimental work on the role of empathy in wage-cut decisions.

### **Empirical Examples**

#### **Example 1: The role of empathy in wage-cut decisions.**

We conducted a study to assess the role of empathy in wage-cut decisions (see Dietz & Kleinlogel, under review, for a detailed description of the method and results). A sample of 112 students attending social psychology seminars at the University of Kiel in Germany (62% women,  $M_{age} = 23.62$ ) were recruited to participate in a two-stage study. In the first stage, participants completed a questionnaire on individual differences including a measure of empathy. Participants' levels of empathy were measured using two 7-item subscales developed by Davis (1980), the perspective taking scale and the empathic concern scale. The perspective taking scale assesses "the tendency or ability of the respondent to adopt the perspective, or point of view, of other people" (p. 6). A sample item is "Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place." The empathic concern scale indicates "the tendency for the respondent to experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others undergoing negative experiences" (p. 6). A sample item is "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me."

In the second stage, four weeks later, participants worked on an in-basket exercise in which they played the role of a manager and had to make decisions regarding several managerial dilemmas. The task of interest concerned a potential wage-cut for overpaid personnel. Participants received a memorandum from the president of the company explaining that economic conditions in southern Germany

had driven wage levels down for easily replaceable, unskilled labour and that the company paid their personnel in this category 9% above the market wage rate. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: Request to cut wages (Condition 1), and request to hold wages constant (Condition 2). In the cut-wages condition, the president of the company mentioned that the best decision would be to respond to the problem by immediately cutting the wages of those people who were over-paid. In the hold-wages-constant condition, the president mentioned that the best decision would be to hold the wage levels constant. Following the request from the president to cut wages (Condition 1) or to hold wages constant (Condition 2), participants were asked to make a decision either to cut wages (coded as "1") or not (coded as "0").

We were interested in whether and how participant levels of empathy had an effect on the decision to cut wages as a function of a request to cut or hold them constant. Past research has shown that when individuals received an instruction, they consistently demonstrated compliance even if the instruction was unethical (e.g., Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000; Petersen & Dietz, 2008). This effect is explained by the role obligations of individuals, i.e. as subordinates they have to comply with the instructions received from an authority figure (Brief et al., 2000). We therefore expected an effect of the president's instruction on the decision to cut wages. We also expected an interaction between president instructions and participant levels of empathy and proposed that empathic individuals, through their capacity to take the perspective of others and their concern towards persons in need, would refrain from complying with an instruction that would harm others. We therefore hypothesized that in the cut-wages condition, participants with higher levels of empathy would be less likely to make the decision to cut wages. However, in the

hold-wages-constant condition, participant levels of empathy should not affect decision making.

As expected, results revealed an effect of the experimental manipulation demonstrating that participants in the cut-wages condition were more likely to cut wages than participants in the hold-wages-constant condition. Results also provided evidence that the effect of the experimental manipulation on the decision to cut wages was dependent on participants' level of empathy. Consistent with our prediction, in the cut-wages condition, participant levels of empathy had a negative effect on the decision to cut wages, while in the hold-wages-constant condition, participant levels of empathy did not affect the decision to cut wages. Hence, empathy led to positive deviance from organizational pressures because empathic individuals violated traditional norms of organizational compliance only when the well-being of other stakeholders was at risk (see Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004).

**Example 2: The role of empathy in moral disengagement.**

Detert, Trevino, and Sweitzer (2008) conducted a multi-wave survey study to assess the role of empathy and moral disengagement (i.e., processes through which individuals justify unethical behaviours) on unethical decision making. A sample of 307 students participated in the three surveys spanning two semesters. Surveys 1 and 2 aimed to measure participants' individual differences, including their levels of empathy and moral disengagement. Empathy was measured in Survey 1 using the sympathy 10-item scale from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 2001). To assess participants' level of moral disengagement, the authors adapted the measure developed by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996). Survey 3 aimed to collect data on participants' unethical decision making. Participants were

asked to read eight ethically charged scenarios and had to indicate how likely they would engage in the behaviours described in each of the scenarios.

Detert et al. (2008) proposed that empathy was related to unethical decision making through moral disengagement, such that empathy was negatively related to moral disengagement, which in turn would have a negative effect on the ethicality of decisions. Their argument was that empathic individuals are able to imagine how a person is affected by a situation and are concerned about how the person feels, and, hence, are less likely to morally disengage. Furthermore, the link between moral disengagement and unethical behaviour could be explained by a lack of self-censure and reduced feelings of guilt under conditions of high moral disengagement. The findings of their study supported these predictions. More precisely, they found an effect of empathy on moral disengagement and an effect of moral disengagement on unethical decision making. Results also provided evidence of the mediating effect of moral disengagement on the relationship between empathy and unethical decision making. These findings demonstrated that empathic individuals were less likely to rationalize unethical decision making through processes of moral disengagement than individuals low on empathy.

### **Example 3: The role of empathy in ethical decision making.**

Menci and May (2009) studied the effect of empathy on individuals' ethical decision making. A sample of 93 human resource professionals participated in a study composed of two parts, a scenario and a survey including a measure of empathy. First, participants read a scenario describing an employee experiencing health problems (participants were randomly assigned to one of the six different variations of the scenario), and filled out the ethical decision making components scale (see Menci & May, 2009, for more details about the scenarios and the measure). This scale was



composed of four 4-item subscales on moral recognition, principle-based moral evaluation, utilitarian moral evaluation, and moral intention. To measure participants' level of empathy, the authors created two measures based on two of the four subscales from Davis's (1980) empathy measure (i.e., empathic concern and perspective taking).

Mencl and May (2009) proposed that cognitive empathy would not have the same effect as affective empathy on individual ethical decision making processes (i.e., on the four components of the ethical decision making measure). They found that cognitive empathy was related to principle-based evaluations that placed the individual's own responsibilities toward others and the well-being of others first. Consistent with their reasoning, they also found that empathy was not related to utilitarian evaluations that relied on cost-benefit analyses. In addition, the authors reported an effect of cognitive empathy and a marginally significant effect of affective empathy on ethical decision making. Taken together, these findings suggested that empathic decision makers were more concerned with the well-being of others than with the consequences of the decision in terms of social benefits or costs, which then resulted in others-oriented ethical behaviour.

#### **Example 4: The role of empathy in negotiation.**

Cohen (2010) studied the effect of empathy in a negotiation context by conducting two survey studies. The samples in her two studies were composed of 379 undergraduate students and 172 MBA students respectively. Empathy was measured using the two 7-item Davis (1980) subscales of empathic concern and perspective taking. As dependent variables, participants filled out the Self-reported Inappropriate Negotiation Strategies II scale composed of 25 items (SINS II; Lewicki, Saunders & Barry, 2007). This measure was composed of seven subscales describing different

unethical bargaining tactics (e.g., traditional competitive bargaining, false promises, and inappropriate information gathering).

The author proposed that the individual difference characteristic of empathic concern was related to the disapproval of ethically questionable tactics of negotiation while the individual difference characteristic of perspective taking was not. She argued that as opposed to individuals who took the perspective of others, individuals high on empathic concern understood how other persons felt and would take this into account in their decision making. The results supported these predictions, providing evidence that the affective component of empathy (i.e., empathic concern) led to the disapproval of unethical tactics of negotiation while the cognitive component of empathy (i.e., perspective taking) did not.

### **Summary.**

The reviewed studies showed that empathy could play a critical role in ethical decision making. In our experimental study, we demonstrated that empathic participants were less likely to make a decision to cut wages than low empathic participants when they received the request to do so. We also reported empirical evidence showing that empathy can foster ethical decision making through less moral disengagement (Detert et al., 2008), through principle-based evaluations and moral intention (Mencl & May, 2009), and through the disapproval of ethically questionable negotiation tactics (Cohen, 2010). A general pattern across these studies is that by virtue of their ability to take the position of others and to feel like them, empathic individuals frequently make others-oriented decisions and thereby suppressing self-favouring or egoistic tendencies. In the following section, we present the negative side of empathy in ethical decision making.

## **The Negative Side of Empathy in Ethical Decision Making**

### **Theoretical Arguments**

#### **The two facets of empathy: Genuine empathy versus pity.**

Although the emotion of empathy has a positive connotation as pointed out above, empathy can also undermine the ethicality of decision making processes. As mentioned earlier, empathy is a complex emotion that includes diverse feelings. For instance, empathic feelings include sympathy, warmth, compassion, soft-heartedness, tenderness, and feeling moved (see Batson, 1991).

Which facets of empathic feelings dominate is in part dependent on the state of the target of the empathy as Batson (1990, p. 339, footnote) pointed out. On the one hand, empathy includes feelings of “pleasure, delight, satisfaction, and joy” when the observed person “is in a state of benefit, having achieved a goal or won a prize, or is playing gleefully.” On the other hand, empathy includes feelings of “sympathy, compassion, sorrow, and pity” when the observed person “is in a state of need, having failed at a task or suffered a loss, or is enduring pain.”

We propose that these two facets of empathy might affect behaviours differently, such that individuals are more likely to help others, the more that others display a state of need (but only so long as the need of the target person is not so strong as to cause feelings of distress in the perceiver). Our argument is that individuals are generally more sensitive to the distress than to the well-being of others. As a result, empathic individuals focus particularly on people in trouble by helping them, while failing to help people who do not display distress. The ethicality of decision making processes would thus be undermined if empathic individuals decided to help only persons displaying need and distress and not persons in need who fail to display this need and the corresponding distress.

**Empathy-biased decisions.**

Empathy-biased decisions might occur on the basis of at least two rationales. First, empathy is induced when someone observes another person who is in need (e.g., Davis, 1983). According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, the empathic person will engage in helping behaviours (e.g., Batson, 2009). This view also implies that if empathy is felt for a specific person, the empathic individual would focus on helping this person in particular potentially at the expense of others. Hence, by over-focusing their attention on a given person, empathic individuals might fail to notice the distress of other persons. The ethicality of the decision making process would therefore be undermined if the empathic person decided to help only the person to whom empathy is felt, while he or she can also help the other needy persons at the same time. In this case, it would result in an unfair outcome based on favouritism.

Second, empathy can also lead to a biased decision making process when the feeling of empathy becomes too strong and turns into personal distress (Hodges & Biswas-Diener, 2007). A feeling of distress consists of “personal feelings of anxiety and discomfort that result from observing another’s negative experience” (Davis, 1980, p. 2). Contrary to empathy which occurs when someone observes a person in need and takes his or her perspective, personal distress occurs when someone observes a person in need and experiences a strong negative emotional reaction to that. Personal distress is thus a self-oriented emotion which implies that individuals feeling personal distress focus on reducing their discomfort rather than on helping the person in need. Individuals may decide either to help the person in need, or to leave the situation depending on what best relieves their personal distress. In short, empathy that turns into distress leads individuals to no longer engage in altruistic behaviours but rather in self-oriented behaviours aimed at reducing their personal distress.

Research on the negative side of empathy in ethical decision making is sparse. In the next part, we review some empirical studies that, from our point of view, raise some important issues about potential negative effects of empathy in decision making processes and are partially reflective of our theoretical arguments above. We review a study of empathy as pity causing poor decisions. Then, we present how empathy leads to partiality, and selfish behaviours.

### **Empirical Examples**

#### **Example 1: Empathy and pity.**

Lee and Murnighan (2001) proposed the empathy-prospect model stating that depending on how the situation of the observed person was, and particularly depending on whether the person was in a state of loss or of benefit, individuals were more or less likely to engage in helping behaviours. To test their propositions, Lee and Murnighan conducted two studies. In Study 1 a sample of 149 students participated in a scenario study, in which they had to take the role of a supervisor who overheard a discussion between two employees about an incident that happened with one of their colleagues who was a supervisor as well. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight different variations of the next part of the scenario. In each of the versions, the consequences of the incident on the colleague supervisor were manipulated (i.e., positive consequences vs. negative consequences for him). After the scenario, participants filled out a questionnaire in which they had to indicate what they would do and why. Empathy was measured using the items developed by Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson, Bolen, Cross, & Heuringer-Benefiel, 1986).

Results provided evidence on the empathy-prospect model by demonstrating that participants were more likely to feel empathy when they learnt their colleague faced a loss than when they learnt he faced a gain. In addition, they found that the loss

situation had an effect on participants' empathy through a stronger perception of need, which then led to a stronger intention to help. Following the reasoning from Batson (1990), these findings may also suggest that empathy, when characterized by negative feelings such as sorrow and pity, is more likely to have an impact on individual behaviours than when empathy is characterized by positive feelings such as pleasure and joy.

**Example 2: Empathy and partiality.**

Batson, Klein, Highberger, and Shaw (1995) studied whether empathy-induced altruism can lead to immoral decision making by conducting two experiments. In their first study involving a sample of 60 students, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions in which participants' empathy was manipulated. In two conditions, participants had to read a text describing something negative that happened recently to a person. Previously they had either been asked to take an objective perspective when reading the text (i.e., low empathy condition) or to imagine how the person felt about what was described (i.e., high empathy condition). In the third condition, participants did not read any text. Then, participants had to make decisions that would affect the well-being of other persons, including the person described in the text.

The authors proposed that empathy could induce target specific altruistic behaviours. They hypothesized that participants induced to feel empathy towards a specific person (i.e., high empathy condition) would not respect the moral principle of justice by favouring the person described in the text. Thus, empathy would lead to favouritism for the person for whom they felt empathy for at the expense of the other persons affected by the situation, while the moral principle of justice would not be violated in the low empathy condition. Findings supported the predictions.

Participants who were induced to feel empathy towards a specific person were inclined to favour this person over other persons, while participants not induced to feel empathy engaged in a fair decision making process, and thus respected the principle of justice. Oceja (2008) recently replicated these findings in two experiments. These findings provide further evidence for partiality when individuals display empathy for a specific person. In addition, in these experiments, empathy resulted in unfair decision making when participants did not personally know the individual in need for whom they were induced to feel empathy. Empathy may lead to even more partiality when the empathic individual personally knows the person in need. In summary, empathy comes with the risk of partiality, in particular when the targets are personally known, and this partiality undermines ethical decision making.

**Example 3: Empathy and selfish behaviour.**

As mentioned earlier, empathy can lead to personal distress when the emotion is too strong. This switch of emotion can have negative consequences for the person in need as demonstrated by Carrera et al. (2012). These authors conducted two studies aiming at assessing the effect of empathy and personal distress on helping behaviour. In their first study, which was composed of a sample of 77 students, participants were asked to read a story describing a person in need and to look at the picture of that person. Afterwards, they completed a questionnaire including a measure of empathy composed of five of the adjectives commonly used by Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson et al., 1991), and three items related to the story (see Carrera et al., 2012, for more details about the measure of empathy). Personal distress was measured using the six following adjectives: worried, distressed, disturbed, upset, troubled, and agitated. For each scale, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they experienced these emotions when they read the story. Participants then had the opportunity to

indicate whether they would like to help the needy person by filling out a Helping Form.

Carrera et al. (2012) proposed that participants who felt empathy towards a needy person would be more likely to engage in helping behaviour than participants who felt personal distress. Findings were supportive of this prediction. Helping behaviour was more likely when participants felt empathy than when they felt personal distress. Results also indicated that the behaviour of participants who felt personal distress was driven by egoistic motives. Their unique goal was to reduce their personal distress and, hence, they were willing to help the person in need only if they thought it was a way to reduce their own discomfort. These findings provide evidence for the switch from altruistically driven behaviour when individuals feel empathy, to egoistically driven behaviour when individuals feel personal distress.

### **Summary.**

The studies reviewed above indicate that empathy can undermine the ethicality of decision making processes which produce outcomes that are unfair to at least some of the involved parties. Empirical evidence shows that empathy is more likely to affect individual helping behaviours when individuals observe a person experiencing negative events than when they observe a person experiencing something positive (Lee & Murnighan, 2001), and that empathy can lead to partiality (Batson et al., 1995) or selfish behaviour (Carrera et al., 2012).

In addition, as pointed out by Hodges and Biswas-Diener (2007) empathy can also have negative consequences for the actors themselves and for the persons to whom empathy is felt. First, empathy can have negative consequences on empathic individuals because their empathy-based behaviour can be costly for themselves, when helping others will “result in material and opportunity costs, as the empathic



person may sacrifice some of his or her own resources” (Hodges & Biswas-Diener, 2007, p. 392). Finally, empathy can have negative consequences on others when empathic individuals behave out of self-interest. Indeed, individuals high on the ability to take perspective can decide to use this ability for their own interest (see Cohen, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

### **Limitations in the Research on Empathy**

The reported studies point to some limitations in the research on empathy. First, different measures of empathy are used across studies. For instance, Detert et al. (2008) measured empathy using the sympathy scale from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 2001). Dietz and Kleinlogel (under review), Mencl and May (2009), and Cohen (2010) measured empathy using Davis’s (1980) scale, and Carrera et al. (2012) used the measure developed and commonly used by Batson and his colleagues (e.g., Batson et al., 1991). The use of different measures implies that empathy is conceptualized differently across studies. In some studies, empathy is measured as a one-dimensional concept (e.g., Detert et al., 2008), while in others there is a distinction between cognitive and affective components of empathy (Mencl & May, 2009). It is obvious that both the conceptualization and operationalization of empathy need to be further investigated. Second, empirical research on the effects of empathy on decision making is sparse. More evidence is therefore needed to be able to draw more robust conclusions of the effects of empathy on ethical decision making processes.

### **Discussion**

This chapter illustrated that empathy can have positive consequences (e.g., ethical decision making), as well as negative consequences (e.g., favouritism) on

ethical decision making. In our opinion, the dual and contradictory effects of empathy might be explained by a distinction between mindful and mindless empathy. Mindful empathy is empathy that is supplemented and evaluated by a consideration of the decision making context, while mindless empathy refers to an automatic application of empathy. For example, empathy for members of under-privileged groups may be mindful if it is supplemented by a consideration of long-term consequences of different helping behaviours for members of these groups (e.g., whether to sponsor them financially or enable them to generate their own income). Empathy for members of under-privileged groups is mindless if it results in automated helping reactions that may satisfy immediate needs without considering long-term implications.

Indeed, it would be naïve to make decisions solely based on empathy. While empathy is an important element for making ethical decisions, it is just one piece of the puzzle that is needed for organizational decision making processes that create value for all stakeholders. For instance, in our wage-cut experiment, empathy played a role in participant decisions to cut wages or to keep them constant, but economic considerations were also likely considered by our participants. In the case of wage cuts, which have been shown to also produce negative outcomes for employers (and not just employees) as employees reciprocate by lower effort (e.g., Kube, Maréchal, & Puppe, 2006), empathy was a productive ingredient in the decision making process. Narrowly focused economic thinking alone might have also motivated a different and poorer decision. However, in some cases empathy can undermine the ethicality of decision making processes particularly when empathic decision makers decide to favour the well-being of those for whom they feel empathy at the expense of the well-being of other stakeholders. In our experiment, if the decision to cut wages would have been vital for the survival of the organization, empathic-based decision making

would have led to an inefficient decision for the organization, which eventually would have had a negative impact on the employees (e.g., bankruptcy).

To conclude, we suggest that organizational functioning would benefit from the inclusion of empathy (and possibly other emotions) in decision making processes. Organizing through empathy can contribute to enhance the ethicality of decision making processes and enhance pro-social and altruistic behaviour within organizations. Therefore, taking into account managers' moral virtues such as empathy seems like an obvious intervention for improving ethical decision making, but can only be effective if organizations have practices and procedures that allow organizational members to express and act on their moral virtues. For instance, organizations may explicitly protocol that decisions should be emotionally comfortable for the decision makers. Otherwise the lack of comfort should be explored explicitly. Hence, emotional reactions can become a check or a warning signal for morally inappropriate decisions. Yet, moral virtues should only be one ingredient in the decision making process. It is also important for decisions to be rationally sound to avoid decision making based on pity or favouritism as reviewed in this chapter.

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Figure 1

Figure 1: Empathy and Ethical Decision Making

