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The Psychology of Moral Judgment: Further Complexities for Personnel Security Programs

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Title: The Psychology of Moral Judgment: Further Complexities for Personnel Security Programs

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Abstract. This article describes psychological research that complicates the personnel security quest to minimize intentional violations of law, regulation, and procedure.

A previous IBPP article (see below) described the complexities of the psychology of moral judgment--viz., the structure, process, and function of beliefs concerning what behaviors are right and wrong--for personnel security programs based on Kohlberg's stage theory and critiques of this theory. For example, at any point in time the moral judgment of members of a security bureaucracy might be best characterized by one of three cognitive levels, each comprised of two stages. Each level and stage combination would be most influenced by a specific personnel security management technique--e.g., specific contingencies of punishment, negative reinforcement, positive reinforcement, or omission training. The security dilemma is to craft a management system that wouldn't concurrently attenuate the base rates of violations for some personnel, increase these rates for others, maintain them for still others, and have no effect on yet others. Other complexities based on critiques of Kohlberg's theory include inadequacies in predictive validity between moral judgment and moral behavior and the possibility of continuous fluctuations in moral judgment levels and stages for specific personnel.

The present article continues the analysis by describing additional complexities. (1) Kohlberg's theory and theories of other significant researchers such as Gilligan (see below) suggest that morality is largely a matter of individual differences among pertinent intrapsychic phenomena. These phenomena appear to be salient regardless of moral dilemma for a specific individual at a specific developmental interval. In these theories, the affordances and stimulus pulls of stimuli external to an individual seem epiphenomenal, of secondary import, or even insignificant in generating moral behavior and antecedent intrapsychic phenomena. Yet, in a personnel security manager's nightmares--based on anecdotes, case lore, and training--the unique aspects of a tempting situation seem quite significant. (2) Theories of moral judgment seem not to have adequately attenuated potential gender biases in the assigning of levels and stages to specific individuals. Attempts to equate or compare care-based, justice-based, and other orientations of moral focus seem to reflect more about researcher ideologies and political agendas than optimizing scientific methods. Moreover, females and males may present nomothetic differences in what kinds of social situations constitute moral dilemmas--and how often various dilemmas occur through conscious and unconscious self-selection and become (via their external features) robust in generating moral behavior. Yet, the personnel security manager needs to attenuate gender biases--if they exist--to avoid the legal contesting of human resource procedures as well as the compromising of sensitive information, sources, and methods. (This complexity is further increased by the necessary consideration of other sex-related variables such as sex role, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and their biopsychosocial interaction.) (3) The assessment procedures associated with moral judgment theories seem to be based on social situations far removed from those confronted by most individuals in their daily lives. Insufficient ecological validity does not bode well for the generalization of empirical and experimental findings. Yet, the personnel manager is often most interested in the vulnerabilities arising from the conflicts of everyday life. (4) Moral judgment theories seem to ignore the mechanisms of social learning that elicit movement in developmental sequence. Yet these mechanisms often are very germane in debriefings of security violators and thusly help inform the rationale of a

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

security investigator's questions during background checks. (A counter to this might be that one finds what one is looking for.) (5) Other complexities include the notion that developmentally earlier moral stages and levels do not transform and disappear but remain available for moral calculus. If so, the personnel security manager not only has to worry about a finite number of moral judgment levels and stages across a population but within each individual as well--a most daunting challenge. (In essence, there is both a genotypic (developmental) and phenotypic (expressive) continuum and history that requires analysis.)

Political psychologists will find great social opportunity in attempting to apply contemporary psychological research on morality to personnel security. In the realms of politics, business, science, and technology the personnel security threat is great, the tools to meet it still puny. (See Gilligan, C. (1988). Adolescent development reconsidered. In C. Gilligan, J.V. Ward, & J.M. Taylor (Eds.), *Mapping the moral domain: A contribution of women's thinking to psychological theory and education* (pp. vii-xxxix). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Kohlberg, L. (1984). Synopses and detailed replies to critics. In L. Kohlberg (Ed.), *Essays on moral development: Vol. 2. The psychology of moral development* (pp. 338-361). NY: Harper & Row; The psychology of moral judgment: Applications for counterintelligence and personnel security. (November 22-29, 1996). *IBPP*, 1(4); Wark, G.R., & Krebs, D.L. (1996). Gender and dilemma differences in real-life moral judgment. *Developmental Psychology*, 32, 220-230.) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Moral, Personnel Security.)