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This paper explores the biased perceptions that people hold of their own ethicality. We argue that the temporal trichotomy of prediction, action and recollection is central to these misperceptions: People predict that they will behave more ethically than they actually do, and when evaluating past (un)ethical behavior, they believe they behaved more ethically than they actually did. We use the “want/should” theoretical framework to explain the bounded ethicality that arises from these temporal inconsistencies, positing that the “should” self dominates during the prediction and recollection phases but that the “want” self is dominant during the critical action phase. We draw on the research on behavioral forecasting, ethical fading, and cognitive distortions to gain insight into the forces driving these faulty perceptions and, noting how these misperceptions can lead to continued unethical behavior, we provide recommendations for how to reduce them. We also include a call for future research to better understand this phenomenon.

“Enron was filled with crooks.” “Arthur Anderson accountants turned a blind eye to their client’s shady accounting practices.” Most of us believe that we would have behaved differently than the actors who brought about the collapse of these two firms. If you worked at one of these firms and had known about the accounting abuses, you would have done the right thing, right? After all, you behave ethically, don’t you?

In your own mind, perhaps, but reality may paint a different picture. Ample evidence suggests that our predictions of how we will behave and our recollections of our past behavior are at odds with how we actually behave. Specifically, people tend to mispredict how they will behave in the future, often overestimating the extent to which they would engage in socially desirable behaviors (Epley & Dunning, 2000). At the same time, people misremember past experiences as more positive than they actually were (Mitchell, Thompson, Peterson, & Cronc, 1997). These misperceptions, both of prediction and recollection, have important ramifications for the distinction between how ethical we think we are versus how ethical we actually are. People believe they will behave ethically in a given situation, but they don’t. They then believe they behaved ethically when they didn’t. It is no surprise, then, that most individuals erroneously believe they are more ethical than the majority of their peers (Tenbrunsel, 1998).

What explains these findings? It seems that people are subject to “bounded ethicality”; that is, our morality is constrained in systematic ways that favor self-serving perceptions, which in turn can result in behaviors that contradict our intended ethical standards (Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh, 2003). We introduce a temporal dimension to help explain why people are ethically bounded. In doing so, we argue that the temporal

inconsistency between forecasts, present behavior, and memories masks our true (un)ethical self and thus prevents us from being as ethical as we imagine ourselves to be.

Our framework on this temporal trichotomy of prediction, action and recollection in ethical decision making is predicated on an integration of the “want/should” conflict (cf., Bazerman, Tenbrunsel & Wade-Benzoni, 1998) with the research on behavioral forecasting (e.g., Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001; Diekmann, Tenbrunsel, & Galinsky, 2003), temporal construals (e.g., Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003), ethical fading (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004), and cognitive distortions (e.g., Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1976). Noting the distinction between the “want” self (what we desire to do) and the “should” self (thoughts about how we should behave), we will argue that our predictions and post-hoc recollections of our behavior are dominated by the thinking of our “should” self, but, at the time of the decision, our actual actions are dominated by the thinking of our “want” self. We further posit that it is the fading of the ethical implications of the decision during the action phase (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004) that is partially responsible for the dominance of the “want” self during this time (O'Connor, de Dreu, Schroth, Barry, Lituchy, & Bazerman, 2002). When ethical fading occurs—a process by which a person does not realize that the decision she is making has ethical implications and thus ethical criteria do not enter into her decision—the “should” self has no reason to be activated. Consequently, the “want” self is allowed to freely dominate the decision and unethical behavior ensues.

The “want/should” conflict, coupled with the temporal dimension inherent in the phases of prediction, behavior, and recollection, allow for the sustained belief that we are more ethical than our actions demonstrate, a faulty misperception of ourselves that is

difficult to self-correct. Given that predicting our future behavior and reflecting on our past behavior are key components of decision making and planning, this represents a serious obstacle for improving ethical behavior. Our arguments thus provide a framework for a better understanding of the sources of the discrepancy between our self-perceptions and our behavior. Others have noted that good people sometimes do bad things (Banaji et al., 2003; Bazerman, Loewenstein, & Moore, 2002). We take this observation a step further through a temporal examination of this phenomenon, and in so doing, highlight how our misperceptions are perpetuated over time.

We begin by reviewing research on bounded ethicality, which notes the discrepancies between individuals' internal set of ethics and their actual (un)ethical behavior. We then explore these discrepancies by examining the three discrete temporal phases of prediction, action, and recollection. In the discussion of prediction, we integrate the "want/should" literature with research on behavioral forecasting to understand why our predictions of our future behavior are so often faulty. We then turn to the actual decision phase, which we will argue is accompanied by diminished ethical awareness and unethical behavior. We follow with a discussion of the recollection phase, delving into the role of distortions in our recollections of our past behavior. Finally, we end with a discussion of the implications highlighted by our arguments, including an agenda for future research and the changes that need to be made to increase the prevalence of ethical behavior.

Bounded Ethicality

This paper is not about intentional unethical action, entailing the conscious deliberations between right and wrong that are the focus of most treatments of ethics. Rather, it is rooted in research that some ethicists consider to be outside the realm of ethics: decision making that leads to behavior that is widely viewed as unethical, though no ethical deliberation has taken place.¹

Bounded ethicality describes the systematic and predictable psychological processes that lead people to engage in ethically questionable behaviors that are inconsistent with their own preferred ethics (Banaji & Bhaskar, 2000; Banaji et al., 2003; Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005). People unwittingly engage in behaviors that they would condemn upon further reflection or awareness. This perspective explains how an executive can make a decision that not only harms others, but is also inconsistent with his or her conscious beliefs and preferences.

Chugh et al. (2005) described bounded ethicality as a manifestation of Simon's concept of bounded rationality in ethical domains. Just as Simon describes a "behavioral model (in which) human rationality is very limited, very much bounded by the situation and by human computational powers" (1983, page 34), Chugh et al. (2005) described "bounded ethicality" as the bounded limitation of individuals that lead people to engage in ethically questionable behaviors that are inconsistent with their own preferred ethics. They argue that ethical decisions are biased due to the desire of people to see themselves as moral, competent, and deserving, and thus, not susceptible to conflicts of interest.

¹ In our paper we use the term "ethical behavior" broadly in reference to acting in accord with prescribed norms.

Examples of the consequences of bounded ethicality abound: overclaiming credit for group work without realizing that you are doing so, engaging in implicit discrimination and ingroup favoritism, overdiscounting the future and harming the environment, falling prey to the influence of conflicts of interest, and failing to realize that you hold overly positive views of yourself (Bazerman and Moore, 2008; Caruso, Epley, & Bazerman, 2006), to name a few. Chugh et al.'s (2005) summary of the literature on implicit attitudes documents how it is that people act in racist and sexist ways without being aware that they are doing so. Messick (1994) provides another example of bounded ethicality, arguing that mortgage loan discrimination against minorities is much more likely to result from lenders' unconscious favoritism toward ingroups than from explicit hostility toward outgroups. Wade-Benzoni (1999; 2002; 2008a; 2008b) documents the multiple ways in which we overly discount the future, often without awareness that we are acting in ways that may harm future generations. Moore, Tetlock, Tanlu and Bazerman (2006) summarize the evidence that, while we recognize others' conflicts of interest, we fail to recognize conflicts of interest that we ourselves face that lead to corrupt behavior. And, Gino and Bazerman (2009) show that people are more likely to accept others' unethical behavior when ethical degradation occurs slowly rather than in one abrupt shift – modeling one view of how so many Arthur Anderson accountants could have failed to notice or react to the ongoing transgressions at Enron. Chugh (2004) argues that such bounded ethicality is exacerbated by the demands of executive life, which causes an over-reliance on intuition rather than intentional deliberation.

In this paper, we strive to enhance our understanding of bounded ethicality by integrating the “want/should” framework with the temporal dimensions of an ethical dilemma to explore the inherent discrepancies between our perceptions and our actions. We review the “want/should” literature below and argue that the appearance and corresponding disappearance of the “want” and “should” selves allows for these discrepancies between our beliefs about ourselves and our actual behavior. In doing so, we provide insight into why even the most honorable people predict that they will behave more ethically in the future than they actually do and recollect the past in a way that allows them to believe that they are more ethical than an objective third party would conclude.

The “Want” versus The “Should” Self

You fully plan to tell your client that there is no way your company can meet his delivery expectations. When he inquires, however, you assure him that meeting his goals is “quite possible.”

You are preparing to negotiate with a potential employer. You don’t have any other offers, so your bargaining position seems weak. You develop a number of valid arguments for receiving a higher salary. During the negotiation, however, when the employer asks you to justify a higher salary than offered, you find yourself implying that you have several solid offers with higher salaries.

Why do we imagine we will be honest with clients, colleagues, and prospective employers, but when we are presented with the situation, we make misleading statements to them? In other words, why do we believe we will behave one way and then behave differently? And why, when reflecting back on our past behavior, do we believe we acted ethically? We argue that the answers to these questions are rooted in the “want/should” conflict (Bazerman et al., 1998).

Bazerman et al. (1998) proposed the “want/should” distinction to describe intrapersonal conflicts that exist within the human mind. The “want” self is reflected in choices that are emotional, affective, impulsive, and “hot headed.” In contrast, the “should” self is characterized as rational, cognitive, thoughtful, and “cool headed.” The presence of these two selves within one mind results in frequent clashes: We know we should behave ethically when negotiating with our client, for example, but our desire to close the sale causes us to make misleading statements. The resolution of the battle between these two selves is argued to depend on the number of options presented to the decision maker, the need to justify one’s decision to others, and the uncertainty associated with the outcome of the behaviors (Bazerman et al., 1998).

Bazerman et al.’s “want/should” theory provides operational specification to the more general class of issues known as the “multiple selves” problem (Strotz, 1956; Ainslie, 1975, 1992; Sen, 1977; Thaler, 1980; Winston, 1980; Schelling, 1984; Elster, 1985). Earlier work on the self-concept, and the emphasis on its multi-dimensionality, led to the realization that referring to *the* self-concept didn’t make sense (Markus & Wurf, 1987); rather, the self-system is argued to be best described as consisting of multiple self-conceptions that are activated under different contexts (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007).

The co-existence of these multiple self-conceptions led to discussion on the conflict that people may experience between these different aspects of their self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Schelling (1984), for example, argued that two different selves exist within us, each with its own set of attribute weights, leading to differential preferences for given behaviors. This explains, he argued, why people engage in a variety of irrational behaviors, such as saving for Christmas by putting money in a non-interest-

bearing checking account, paying extra taxes in order to get a refund, smoking, and gambling (Schelling, 1980, 1984). Others have similarly characterized this phenomenon, including Thaler (1980), who suggested that we each have a “planner” and a “doer” self, and Elster (1985), who argued that such intrapersonal conflict is best described as a “collective action problem” in which one needs to try to prevent one of the selves from enacting a defecting choice that would be detrimental to the collectivity of selves. Loewenstein (1996), though calling into question the use of the “multiple selves” metaphor, similarly noted the disconnection between deliberation and action and argued that it is perpetuated by transient factors (such as hunger, sleep, and moods) that prompt visceral responses at odds with long-term self interest.

The “want/should” theory is useful for understanding differences between our intentions, our behavior and our interpretations of past behavior when presented with an ethical decision. While previously the “should” self has been defined as more “rational” than the “want” self (Bazerman et al., 1998), we posit that the “should” self also encompasses ethical intentions and the belief that we should behave according to ethical principles. In contrast, the “want” self reflects behavior that is characterized more by self-interest and a relative disregard for ethical considerations. As explained in the next section, these selves are differentially dominant in different contexts, producing the discrepancy between prediction, action, and recollection.

Unethical Behavior and the Contextual Trichotomy of Past, Present, and Future

A temporal dimension is inherently embedded in the “want/should” tension. The “want” self is argued to emerge at or near the time a decision is made and to recede

before and after the decision is made (Bazerman et al., 1998; O'Connor et al. 2002).

When you make impossible assurances to a client or imply that you have other job offers, your “want” self is at the forefront. The “should” self is present prior to the decision or after the behavior has been enacted, when we typically conclude that we will, or did, tell the truth.

The temporal dimension is also reflected in more general descriptions of the multiple selves problem. Previous work on self-concepts acknowledged the importance of time, arguing that to understand self-presentation more completely, a temporal dimension needed to be included (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The inappropriate discounting rates that people apply to the future have been argued to be rooted in the internal phenomenon of one self valuing immediate gratification and another self valuing future benefit (Ainslie, 1975; 1992; Shefrin & Thaler, 1988; Winston, 1980). The “want” self values immediate consumption of a small benefit (i.e., the newest cell phone), whereas the “should” self values saving that money so as to increase purchasing power at a later time. Similarly, one’s preference for a given outcome is argued to depend on whether one is making a decision now or in the future, as perceived costs and benefits differ in these two decision-making situations (Ainslie, 1992; Green, 1982; Loewenstein, 1996). A woman’s estimation of the costs and benefits of natural childbirth, for example, may be different six months prior to giving birth than when she is actually in labor.

Empirically, “want” and “should” choices have been associated with a temporal separation, with “want” choices more prevalent in the present and “should” choices more prevalent in the future. This is demonstrated in a set of studies by O'Connor et al. (2002) who examined reactions to low offers in an ultimatum game. In these studies,

participants' actual behavior—rejecting the low offer—was more closely related to what they wanted to do than what they thought they should do (i.e., accept the unfair offer as something was better than nothing). In contrast, prior to the decision and after the decision, participants' preferences were more closely reflective of their “should” selves, that is to accept the offer. In addition, they found that what people wanted to do and what they thought they should do were very similar when this information was collected before and after the decision. But, in the heat of the moment, however, the emotional, affective, and hot-headed “want” self diverged from the “should” self, took control of the decision, and rejected the unfair offer.

In a similar vein, a distal time perspective has been found to shift attention inwards toward the core values that define a person, activating the “idealistic” self; in contrast, temporal proximity is argued to distract people away from their intrinsic values and highlight instead the situation and extrinsic inducements, a process which in turn activates the “pragmatic” self (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007). In one study, for instance, Kivetz and Tyler (2007) found that from a distance (1 year in the future), college students chose an idealistic choice (e.g., a course with a professor who treats students with respect and dignity), but as the time neared (a few days before the course starts), students chose the pragmatic choice (e.g., a course with a professor who gives high grades). Time perspective (distal vs. proximal) activates differential selves (idealistic vs. pragmatic) and leads to differential preferences and choices: the more distal the time perspective, the greater preferences for identity versus instrumental benefits. We note that the pragmatic versus idealistic distinction is similar to the “want/should” framework, with pragmatic corresponding to the “want” self and idealistic corresponding to the “should” self.

In the context of movie preferences, Read, Loewenstein, and Kalyanaraman (1999) found that “should” choices (or what they call “virtue”) are more prevalent when a behavior will occur in the future and that “want” choices (what they call “vice”) are more prevalent when the behavior is to occur immediately. In a related study of customers of an online video company, Milkman, Rogers, and Bazerman (2007) found that people focus more on what they think they should watch when ordering movies, but more on what they want to watch when it comes time to actually watch a movie. Specifically, the researchers created an independent system to rate each movie available on a “want/should” index. Study participants rated a subsample of movies, and based on these ratings, a regression equation was created to rate the “want/shouldness” of all movies in a rental company’s database. Based on this classification scheme, for example, an extreme “want” movie was the 2003 action film “Kill Bill: Volume 1,” and an example of a “should” movie was the 1933 documentary “90 Degrees South: With Scott to the Antarctic.” The greater a movie’s “should” component, the longer the time it takes customers to return the movie to the online video company, thus suggesting a delay in watching those movies.

Similarly, Rogers, Milkman, and Bazerman (2007) demonstrated that consumers of an online grocery ordering service were more likely to purchase healthy and useful items (“should” choices) when the food was to be delivered in the far future than in the near future. Rogers and Bazerman (2007) also found that people are more likely to make “should” choices – such as donating to charity, supporting an increase in the price of fish to reduce over-harvesting of the ocean’s fisheries, and supporting an increase in the price

of fossil fuel to reduce consumption – if the action will be implemented in the future rather than in present.

We argue that it is the temporal separation of the “want” and “should” selves that allows for their separate and continued existence and, ultimately, allows us to believe we are more ethical than we really are. Specifically, prior to making a decision that has an ethical dimension, we believe we will act in line with the “should” self; in the aftermath of an unethical decision, we distort our perceptions of our behavior so that it looks as if we did just that. However, at the time of the decision, our “want” self dominates and we behave unethically. In other words, we believe we will behave ethically and, when we do not, we still perceive that we did. The temporal disconnection between prediction, action, and recollection thus allows us to falsely perceive that we act in accordance with our “should” self when we actually behave in line with our “want” self. To explore this trichotomy, we integrate the “want/should” framework with previously disparate literatures on behavioral forecasting, temporal construal, ethical fading, and cognitive distortion, using them to identify the cognitive and motivational factors that both distinguish and explain each of the three phases.

Mispredicting One’s Own Ethical Behavior: Behavioral Forecasting Errors

The behavioral forecasting literature highlights the inherent discrepancy between predictions of our own behavior and our actual behavior. A growing number of studies have shown that people’s forecasts of their behavior are often inaccurate (Osberg & Shrauger, 1986; Sherman, 1980). People generally are overly optimistic, predicting they can complete tasks and accomplish their goals more quickly than they actually do

(Buehler, Griffin, & MacDonald, 1997; Buehler, Griffin, & Ross, 1994; Newby-Clark, Ross, Buehler, Koehler, & Griffin, 2000). Further, people are generally overly confident in their predictions about their future behaviors (Vallone et al., 1990). In one examination of such errors in behavioral prediction, Buehler and colleagues found that over half of their participants overestimated how quickly they could complete tasks such as school projects and assignments, with the prediction error ranging as high as several weeks (Buehler et al., 1994). Similarly, Gilovich et al. (1993) found that students tended to overestimate how well they would perform on future exams.

These forecasting errors also have been found in interpersonal situations involving conflict. For example, Woodzicka and LaFrance (2001) examined reactions to real versus imagined sexual harassment in a job interview context. They found that women who imagined being asked sexually harassing questions by a male interviewer predicted they would take some action against the interviewer (e.g., telling him it was none of his business, leaving the interview, or reporting the incident to a supervisor). However, none of the women who were subjected to this situation took any of these actions; most ignored the sexual harassment and answered the questions as if they were standard interview questions. Similarly, in a negotiation context, Diekmann and colleagues (2003) found that individuals who imagined facing a very competitive opponent predicted they would be much more competitive and more likely to stand firm than those who imagined facing a less competitive opponent. In fact, those who actually negotiated against an opponent they thought to be very competitive became *less* competitive than those who negotiated against an opponent they thought to be less

competitive. Rather than battling the very competitive opponent, participants gave in and agreed to worse outcomes than they predicted they would.

Newby and colleagues (2000) argue that peoples' self-predictions generally reflect their hopes and desires rather than realistic self-understanding. Overly optimistic and self-enhancing predictions are more likely when the decision choice involves socially desirable behaviors, such as superior performance or altruistic behaviors (Sherman, 1980; Diekmann et al., 2003). Diekmann et al. (2003) noted that confronting a harasser and standing up to a very competitive opponent are both socially desirable behaviors; thus, it is not surprising that forecasting errors are found in these domains.

Taking this point a step further, Epley and Dunning (2000) argued that people make overly optimistic and self-enhancing predictions about whether they will engage in moral behaviors. In one study, the researchers found that individuals overestimated the likelihood that they would contribute time and money to charitable causes. Eighty-three percent of participants predicted they would buy at least one daffodil during an American Cancer Society fundraiser to be held in five weeks; only 43% actually did so five weeks later. In another study, participants predicted they would donate \$2.44 of their \$5.00 participant payment to a charity such as the Salvation Army; they actually donated only \$1.53. In a third study, participants in a prisoner's dilemma game made similar behavioral forecasting errors: 84% predicted they would cooperate with their counterpart rather than defect, but only 61% actually did so. What makes these types of errors in prediction particularly insidious is that people are unaware of their susceptibility to them (Epley & Dunning, 2006).

A comparison of findings from the behavioral forecasting literature with the “want/should” framework reveals an insightful integration: the behavior that people predict they will engage in is driven by the “should” self, a behavior that differs from the “want” driven actual behavior. We know we should contribute to charity by buying daffodils, but at the moment we are asked, we want to keep the money for lunch. We know we should confront a harassing interviewer during a job interview, but at the time the harassing questions are asked, we want the job. We know we should be ambitious negotiators, but during the negotiation itself, we want to avoid additional conflict. Prior to our decision, our “should” selves dominate. At the time of the decision, though, our “want” selves dominate. Our predictions, which are based on a “should” response, are thus misaligned with our behavior, which is dominated by the “want” self.

Acting Unethically in the Present: A Case of Ethical Fading

While prior to a decision, we forecast that we will behave ethically, our actual behavior in the action phase tells a different story. We believe we would be honest with our clients or potential employer, but when the time comes and we are actually faced with the decision, we deceive others to achieve better outcomes for ourselves. What accounts for such errors in self-prediction? Several different but related explanations have been offered in an attempt to answer this question. We overview the explanations that have been offered for such misalignment and offer an additional factor – ethical fading (i.e., a process by which a person does not realize that the decision she is making has ethical implications and thus ethical criteria do not enter into her decision) – that is particularly

important in understanding differences between forecasts and actual behaviors in decisions involving ethical dilemmas.

Established Explanations for Behavioral Forecasting Errors

One reason for our erroneous self-predictions is that our forecasts may reflect desirability concerns regarding our future selves whereas our actions reflect feasibility concerns (Sherman, 1980; Liberman and Trope, 1998). As discussed above, our forecasts often are distorted in a self-enhancing manner. According to Liberman and Trope (1998), desirability concerns strongly affect people's predictions of their behavior. Successfully achieving goals, contributing to charitable causes, confronting a sexual harasser, and being honest with our clients are likely to be perceived as socially desirable behaviors. As the event becomes closer in time, though, our beliefs and perceptions are influenced less by desirability concerns and more by feasibility concerns such as having money for lunch, obtaining a job or getting the sale. Similarly, Trope and Liberman (2003) argued that our self-identity, and particularly our values and ideologies, are more likely to affect our predictions about the distant future than our predictions about the near future, where the specific features of the situation are more likely to guide behaviors.

A second reason is that people's mental representations, or situational construals, of the future are different than those of the present. Trope and Liberman's (2000; 2003) "temporal construal theory" argues that our interpretation of events changes over time. The researchers proposed that events in the distant future elicit abstract representations, or high-level construals, as compared to events in the near future, which elicit more concrete details, or low-level construals. Further, Diekmann et al. (2003) argued that people may make attributional errors about their future selves when making predictions:

when predicting, people focus on how their dispositions will drive their behavior and fail to consider adequately the situational forces that actually drive their behavior.

Indeed, when thinking about the future, it is difficult to anticipate all of the factors that will emerge that may impact our behavior (Griffin et al., 1990; Vallone et al., 1990). When making predictions, people focus on salient features of the situation and ignore less salient features. For instance, when we try to predict whether we will donate to a particular charitable cause, we think about the benefits of doing so but fail to accurately identify all of the factors (including time constraints, distractions, and more immediate needs) that will influence us at the time we are asked to donate. Trope and Liberman (2003) used the example of the decision to donate blood to explain why this happens. When we think about whether we will donate blood in the distant future, our general attitudes toward blood donations drive our predictions. But if a particular blood drive is at hand, specific situational factors, such as when and where the donation will take place, are more likely to drive our predictions. From a distance, we see the “big picture”; when the actual situation approaches, people begin to see the details (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Because it is rare that we accurately perceive all the situational constraints that will affect our behavior, we often misconstrue a given situation (Griffin et al., 1990; Vallone et al., 1990) and thereby mispredict our future behavior.

Diekmann and colleagues (Diekmann et al., 2003; Diekmann, Galinsky, Sillito, & Tenbrunsel, 2008) provided evidence that one of the factors that may be misconstrued is the motivations that drive behavior at the time of the decision. They found that, when making predictions about their behavior, people often overlooked their motivations in the actual situation. For example, when predicting whether they would confront a harassing

job interviewer, people focused on the harassing behavior and how upsetting it would be; therefore, they predicted they would respond to the harassment and confront the harasser. At this temporal distance, the motivation to stop the harassment and possibly even to punish the harassing interviewer is most salient. But when faced with a harasser in an actual job interview, the salience of getting the job becomes enhanced. Similarly, when predicting how they would respond to a competitive negotiator, people focus on how to combat the expected competitiveness and fail to consider the important motivation of reaching an agreement and avoiding impasse that governs their actual behavior. Diekmann et al. (2003) argued that this failure to consider the motivations that will be salient during the actual experience often leads forecasters to mispredict their behaviors and results in observed differences between predicted and actual behaviors.

Construals are connected to differential activations of the “want/should” selves. More distal construals are associated with the “should” self whereas more detailed construals are associated with the “want” self. Rogers and Bazerman (2007) showed that the “should” self construes choices from a relatively higher level (i.e., purposive, longer-term horizon) than the “want” self. Similarly, Kivetz and Tyler (2007), building on construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003), proposed that from a distance, an individual’s perspective shifts inwards, toward the core, defining characteristics of the self; the individual’s idealistic self is activated. Individuals think more “globally” and focus on fulfilling their true preferences and values (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). On the other hand, with temporal proximity, the attention shifts to the immediate situation and focuses on practical situations; the pragmatic self is activated. Though using different language than that of the “want/should” literature, both frameworks suggest that the

differential activation in selves may be driven by differences in distal versus proximal construals of the situation.

Ethical Fading: An Additional Explanation for Forecasting Errors in Ethical Dilemmas

In addition to desirability/feasibility concerns and differences in situational construals and shifts in perspectives, there may be other related factors that may help explain differences between predicted and actual behaviors. We propose that in the context of ethical decision making, the varying extent to which people are aware of the ethical implications of the decision, and indeed what type of decision they perceive they are facing, also contribute to differences between forecasts and actual behavior and help explain why we think we are more ethical than we actually are. It has been argued that an understanding of an individual decision-maker's behaviors and perceptions must begin with an understanding of the type of decision she felt she was facing (March, 1995; Messick, 1999). Decision makers first determine the type of decision they are facing, then form expectations and take actions following that assessment. In an ethical context, Rest (1986) proposed that moral awareness is a prerequisite stage that precedes moral judgment, intention, and, ultimately, behavior. Individuals faced with an ethical dilemma thus must first recognize it as such and identify the decision as a moral one.

Tenbrunsel and Messick's (2004) discussion of ethical fading suggests, however, that moral awareness may not always be activated at the time of the decision. Ethical fading is defined as a "process by which, consciously or subconsciously, the moral colors of an ethical decision fade into bleached hues that are void of moral implications" (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004, p. 224). Self-deception allows for the ethical discoloration of a decision, or the fading away of its ethical aspects. Tenbrunsel and Messick (2004)

argue that, in an ethical dilemma, the extent to which a decision maker perceives the ethical aspects of a decision affects his or her ethical behavior. As we will argue, inconsistencies between our predictions and actions are at least partially due to the presence of ethical fading during the action phase and its corresponding absence during the prediction phase.

Previous research has identified various factors that affect the degree to which the ethical aspects of a decision fade, thus allowing the “want” self to emerge. For example, how the individual frames the decision (e.g., whether she views a choice as a business decision or an ethical one) can be affected by the types of sanctions imposed on unethical behavior. Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) discovered that when a weak sanctioning system (i.e., one with a low probability of detecting unethical behavior and a low imposed cost when it was detected) was put into place to increase ethical behavior, the reverse actually occurred; namely, ethical behavior decreased. Examining the decision frames of the decision makers faced with the ethical dilemma, Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) found support for the notion that sanctioning systems fade the ethics from the decision. The majority of decision makers presented with the ethical dilemma without the presence of a weak sanctioning system believed that the decision was best categorized as an ethical decision. By contrast, the majority of decision makers presented with the same dilemma in the presence of a sanctioning system believed the decision was best categorized not as an ethical decision but as a business decision; in the presence of a sanctioning system, the costs of misbehavior became a simple cost of doing business rather than a matter for ethical deliberation.

Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) argued that the presence of a sanctioning system induced a “calculative” mentality in which the decision process was driven by the question “will I get caught and what will be the fine if I do?”; conversely, for those decision makers who did not face the sanctioning system, the situation was best characterized by an ethical analysis, “what is the right thing to do?”. The decision frame and the corresponding ethical fading were in turn associated with actual behavior: those individuals who saw the decision as an ethical one were more likely to behave ethically than those for whom ethical fading had occurred. Providing support for the calculative versus values-driven mentality that dominates a business versus ethical frame, they found that the strength of the sanction had no effect on behavior when an ethical frame had been adopted but did have a significant effect on behavior when a business frame had been adopted. Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) provide a compelling practical demonstration of this phenomenon. In a study of day-care providers, they introduced a fine for parents who arrived late to pick up their children, a problem which required day-care providers to stay late to wait for the parents. They found that such a fine dramatically increased, not decreased, the amount of parents who arrived late. Using the theoretical framework introduced by Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999), the imposition of a fine may have changed the frame from one in which picking up your child on time was the right thing to do to one in which it involved a calculation, a calculation which supported arriving late.

Findings from a set of studies on the effect of environmental standards (Tenbrunsel, Wade-Benzoni, Messick, & Bazerman, 2000) suggest that the presence of real or implied standards (i.e., environmental standards and regulations) can also change the way people think about a decision, and indeed fade the ethics from the situation and

allow the “want” self to emerge. Tenbrunsel et al. (2000) found that standards influence people’s judgments of proposed environmental solutions, independent of the extent to which those solutions protect the environment. Specifically, when proposals to reduce emissions of toxic substances were evaluated one at a time, the approval rate for proposals with smaller reductions that met the standard were more acceptable than greater-reduction proposals that did not conform to the standard. Meeting a standard can become such a dominant decision-making goal, overshadowing the true goal of environmental protection. When standards take on a life of their own, people prefer solutions that conform to the standard over those that actually better protect the environment. Standards thus fade the goal of environmental protection from the decision (and suppresses the “should” self). In further support of the notion that focusing on meeting a goal (such as following the rules of a sanctioning system or meeting an environmental standard) can dominate a decision process, fading the ethics from the situation and suppressing the “should” self, Schweitzer, Ordonez, and Douma (2004) found that goal setting can promote unethical behavior. In their study, people who fell just short of achieving their goals in solving an anagram task were more likely to misrepresent (i.e., overstate) their performance than people who failed to reach their goals by a large margin and people without specific performance goals (i.e., “just do your best”).

Together, these studies suggest that ethical fading can be influenced by contextual factors, such as sanctioning systems, environmental standards or specific goals. Several other factors have been indicated as influencing ethical fading. Language euphemisms, or the linguistic disguises that we use to cover up the unethical aspects of an action, are one

example (Bandura, 1999; Bok, 1989; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Phrases such as “right-sizing” and “creative accounting” hide the ethical implications of more ethically laden phrases such as “firing” and “manipulating the books”, thereby decreasing the salience of the ethical dilemma. The decision is seen as void of ethical implications and hence ethical fading ensues. Repeat exposure to unethical behavior is another factor, leading to ethical numbing (Bandura, 1999; Bok, 1989; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Other factors that inspire the moral discoloration characteristic of the ethical fading process include attributions of causality that allow us to distance ourselves from moral responsibility and constrained self-representations that prevent us from assessing how our actions affect others (see Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004).

We argue that temporal features of the situation also affect ethical fading. When predicting what we would do, the ethical implications of the decision are salient, perhaps because our higher-level construals during the prediction phase focus on socially desirable behaviors. Because of this awareness of the ethical implications, our “should” self is likely to be activated. When actually faced with the decision, the details of the situation overwhelm the ethical features and the ethical implications fade. With this reduced awareness of the ethical implications, our “want” self emerges and is allowed to dominate.

Returning to our earlier example, in the prediction stage, the focal actor imagines he would honestly tell his client that there is no way to meet his delivery expectations. He codes the decision as an ethical one and his “should” self dominates. However, at the time of the decision (the action phase), the focal actor experiences ethical fading and does not code the decision as an ethical one. At this point, the “should” self no longer

dominates and the “want” self takes over. As a result, the focal actor assures his client when he faces him that it’s quite possible to meet his goals.

Ethical Fading during the Action Phase: The Role of Visceral Responses

We argue that the ethical fading process put into motion in the action phase is partly due to the visceral responses that dominate during this time. Visceral responses are linked to basic neurophysiologic mechanisms that help ensure survival. Hunger signals the need for nutritional input, and pain indicates the impingement of some type of potentially harmful environmental factor. Many classic patterns of self-destructive behavior, however, such as overeating and substance abuse, seem to reflect an excessive influence of visceral factors on behavior (Loewenstein, 1996). At low levels of intensity, people are generally capable of dealing with visceral influences. At intermediate levels, impulsive behavior occurs, and at high levels of intensity, visceral factors can be so powerful as to virtually preclude decision making (e.g., no one decides to fall asleep at the wheel) (Loewenstein, 1996).

According to Loewenstein (1996), the disconnection between deliberation and action is perpetuated by transient factors (such as hunger and fatigue, negative moods including anger, and physical pain) that prompt visceral responses at the time of action. At the moment of action, people’s behavior is more automatic and geared toward immediate, instinctive self-preservation. As transient factors such as hunger become more intense, Loewenstein explains, they focus our attention and motivation on activities associated with mitigating that factor—such as eating—and “crowd out” virtually all other goals. A hungry person, for example, is likely to make short-sighted tradeoffs

between immediate and delayed food, even if tomorrow's hunger promises to be as intense as today's.

Visceral factors tend to promote a relatively short-term concern for the self by narrowing our focus inward and toward the present, thus undermining our concern for others' interests and our own long-term self-interest. Additionally problematic is that these responses have been argued to influence behavior without conscious cognitive mediation (Bolles, 1975), leading people to underweight (or even ignore) visceral forces they will experience in the future. As a result, the impact of these visceral responses on moral judgments occurs unnoticed by the decision maker.

Intuitionist approaches in moral psychology make a similar argument in their discussion of the influence of affect on decisions (Haidt, 2001; Kagan, 1984; Schweder & Haidt, 1993; Wilson, 1993; Sonenshein, 2007). These approaches rely on past findings in social psychology that people's judgments and decisions depend on momentary flashes of feeling (Clore, Schwartz & Conway, 1994; Schwarz & Clore, 1983) and on research which shows that affective processing is at work within a quarter second of stimulus presentation (Haidt, 2001). Intuitionist approaches argue that intuition, including moral intuition, occurs quickly and automatically, without effort. Judgments with moral implications, therefore, result from moral intuitions and are thus automatic and effortless (Haidt, 2001).

Connecting this research to the present discussion, visceral responses may arise quickly, unexpectedly and unknowingly. In addition, unlike in the prediction phase, feasibility concerns, not desirability concerns, are dominant. Focus is on the details and the motivations which protect our self-interest. These conditions are ripe for ethical

fading, allowing the “want” self to dominate at the time of the decision. As a result, the “should” self is suppressed and unethical behavior ensues.

Misremembering the Past: Distortions in our Recollections

In the recollection phase of decision-making, when visceral factors are no longer influencing us, the ethical implications of the decision become clearer. As our “should” self reemerges, we begin the process of reconstructing our perceptions of our behavior to reconcile the discrepancy between what happened and our ethical self-perceptions, thus enabling us to satisfy our need for moral self-esteem. It is in this stage that we engage in a process to cast a positive light on our unethical actions.

The threat of violating one’s core values is so strong that merely contemplating such a violation has been found to motivate individuals to take actions that will protect those values (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green & Lerner, 2000). Zhong and Liljenquist (2006), for example, argue that a threat to one’s moral purity creates a motivation to cleanse oneself. They found that offering individuals a chance to physically cleanse themselves after recollecting an unethical act they had engaged in decreased the need for other compensatory behaviors (i.e., volunteering to help).

In addition to physical rituals, the seeming discrepancy between individuals’ unethical actions in the action stage and their ethical self-perceptions in the recollection stage is driven by cognitive actions. The disconnection between our actions and our recollections of those actions is made possible in part by several processes, including differences in construals between the recollection and action stage, selective memory

processing, biased attributions, post hoc justification, and the changing of one's ethical standards.

Construal Differences

With regards to differences in construal between the recollection stage and action stage, Trope and Liberman (2003) argued that, as with predictions of the distant future, perceptions of the distant past are associated with higher-level construals that focus on the broad aspects of the situation rather than the details. This is consistent with other research showing that concrete details diminish from memory more quickly than more abstract features of a situation (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Hastie, Park, & Weber, 1984). Moreover, Ross (1989) has shown that people reconstruct memories of distant events using abstract theories. This helps to explain why recollections of past vacations, for example, become more positive over time, as the details fade away and are replaced by general, broad schemas of the situation (Mitchell et al., 1997). Gilovich et al.'s (1993) study of alumni versus current students is also consistent with this argument. They asked college alumni to project themselves back to their student days and to consider whether they could have handled an increased workload without much effect on their academic and social lives. The alumni believed that, indeed, they could have handled the extra workload. However, current college students experiencing the very situation described indicated that the extra burden would have a large negative impact on their lives. It seems that the further removed in time we are from a situation, whether prospectively or retrospectively, the more positive and confident we become of performing well (Gilovich et al., 1993). People also forget the degree of influence that visceral factors had on their own past behavior which allows for distortions to occur (Loewenstein, 1996).

Again, these differences in construal have been connected to differences in the “want/should” self (Rogers & Bazerman, 2007). The “should” self is associated with higher-level construals that are more general and abstract and don’t focus on the details of the situation while the “want” self focuses on the rich details of the situation that the individual faces. At a distance, whether predicting the future or recollecting the past, people have higher-level construals of the future or past situation and the “should” self is activated. Recollecting the past, people remember their general experience in college as the details of the situation fade. At the time of action, though, people focus on the details and the “want” self dominates. When people are immersed in the situation, the rich details such as increased stress, lack of sleep, and the actual experience of doing the work is much more salient.

Memory Revisionism

The discrepancy between action and recollection is also fueled by “memory revisionism”, a process in which people selectively and egocentrically revise their memory of their behavior. Threats to one’s self-identity are at the heart of this process. Motivated to maintain a coherent self-concept (Epstein, 1973; Markus & Wurf, 1987), individuals experience a crippling anxiety when this coherency is threatened (Moskowitz, Skurnik & Galinsky, 1999). As such, individuals engage in strategies to protect their existing self-image. According to Chaiken et al. (1996), values and moral commitments are part of one’s self definitions and when these are internally challenged, individuals engage in biased strategies to uphold them. The goal of these strategies is not to reach the most accurate assessment but rather to find the conclusion that hangs together well and fits with one’s salient prior beliefs (Perkins, Allen & Hafner, 1983).

One such biased strategy is selective memory in which individuals are motivated to reach a pre-determined conclusion, and thus engage in confirmatory searches, searching for plausible theories and supporting evidence of their biased belief (Baron, 1995; Perkins, Farady & Bushey, 1991; Kunda, 1990; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Darley & Gross, 1983; Snyder & Swann, 1978a, 1978b; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Consequently, memory for affectively potent information about oneself is highly selective and distorted (Mischel et al., 1976) as individuals overweight feedback that supports their self-perception and reject feedback that challenges it (Markus, 1977; Swann & Read, 1981; Baumeister et al., 2001). Following a successful job negotiation, for example, a new hire may forget about having fabricated outside offers and instead highlight in their memory the generous concessions they made to the other party.

The main significance of selective memory is its potential to sustain positive self-perceptions in the face of frequent disconfirmation of such perceptions. Notably, this phenomenon appears to be quite adaptive: Greater memory selectivity is related to higher self-esteem, lower social anxiety, and less depression (O'Banion & Arkowitz, 1977; Zuroff, Colussy, & Wielgus, 1983). It seems clear that selective memory can help us to maintain higher self-esteem, and enable us to believe we generally behave in ethical ways over time despite our past behavior that contradicts this self-perception. While convenient for our self-esteem (and even our happiness), the selective memory mechanism represents a barrier to an accurate understanding of our ethical selves and thus impedes our ability to strive for higher levels of ethics in our everyday lives.

Finally, Bandura (1999) argues that unethical conduct is more likely to occur when people deactivate their cognitive control mechanisms, commonly referred to as moral disengagement. Reversing this causation, Paharia and Deshpande (2009) show that the temptation to buy products that were made under less than high quality ethical conditions (i.e., sweatshops) is justified through a process in which a conscious awareness of the relevant ethical issues is deactivated. Shu, Gino, and Bazerman (2009) find similar moral disengagement and motivated forgetting of moral rules (e.g., the university's honor code) after one behaves dishonestly.

Self-Confirmatory Attributions

When questionable behavior is remembered, one strategy to deal with this memory is to seek self-confirmatory attributions. Behavior that is consistent with prior self-conceptions is attributed to dispositional factors and any behavior that is inconsistent is attributed to situational factors (Kulik, Sledge, & Mahler, 1986). In the client delivery example, the manager may rationalize their fabrication of an early delivery date by arguing that their boss pressured them into it. Such post-hoc attributions are a form of sense-making in which individuals attempt to explain why they acted in a certain way (Weick, 1995). Studies using hypnosis and subliminal presentations have demonstrated that individuals do erroneously construct reasons behind their behavior, making up plausible but false reasons when asked to explain their choices under such situations (Zimbardo, LaBerge, & Butler, 1993; Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). Individuals may also engage in rationalization of their corrupt behavior by utilizing socially constructed accounts that maintain a favorable identity (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Indeed, according

to Haidt (2001), moral reasoning occurs post-hoc, designed to justify one's previously-made moral judgment to others.

Ethical Standard Adjustments

Our recollection of our behavior may be at odds with our actions because people adjust their definition of "ethical" in order to fit their behavior into an acceptable ethical standard. For example, after a negotiation is over, an individual may tell themselves that lies told during that negotiation fell within the mutually understood rules of the game. This adjustment is made possible partially through the "slippery slope" of ethical decision making (Bandura, 1999; Bok, 1989; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Individuals are argued to compare their actions to a personal ethical standard, with one basis for that standard being past behavior. If an unethical action represents a small deviation from the standard, the change between the unethical behavior and the standard is unnoticeable, and the unethical behavior becomes the new standard (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). A consultant who overbills a client by an hour may not notice the departure from his ethical standard of no overbilling and thus "one hour over" becomes the new norm. The one-hour standard will eventually get adjusted to two hours and then to three and then more, but this change will not be important to the consultant. Over a series of decisions, the discrepancy between the standard and the behavior will be noticeable to outsiders but unremarkable to the decision maker due to the incremental manner in which that change came about.

We argue that the omission bias, the tendency for individuals to believe acts of omission (i.e., failure to act to prevent harm) are morally superior to acts of commission (i.e., acts that cause harm) even if they cause the same harm (Ritov & Baron, 1990;

Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991), reinforces these egocentric adaptations of ethical standards when we recollect our past behavior. In many cases, the intuition that commissions are worse than omissions is valid. Omissions may result from ignorance; commissions usually do not (Ritov & Baron, 1990). In addition, if we accept that morality depends greatly on intent, commissions can be seen as less moral, as they usually involve more effort, itself a sign of stronger intentions. However, in cases when knowledge and intentions are held constant, people still consider commissions to be morally worse than omissions, though it isn't clear that they are. For example, most people view active deception to be worse than withholding the truth, even when the actor's intention to deceive is judged to be the same in the two cases (Spranca et al., 1991).

The temporal nature of ethical decision-making highlights how the omission bias can distort the recollection process. Diekmann et al. (2003) argued that people predict more action and reaction than they actually provide. Most people predict that they will have the moral courage to speak up or act when they observe an injustice. Yet, at the time of action, when faced with the opportunity to exert social, psychological, and emotional energy (and possibly political capital as well) to uphold their moral principles, people remain silent and do not act (Diekmann et al., 2003; Milgram, 1974; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). We argued earlier that they may do this in part because the ethical implications of the decision are faded in the action phase and the “want” self dominates. But, when it comes time for reflection, the ethical implications are again salient and the “should” self reasserts itself, and people perceive themselves as being ethical. How do they do this? They adopt an understanding of ethics that reflects the omission bias: they

allow themselves to believe that they were not unethical because they did not act to create additional harm. That is, they focus their assessment of ethical behavior away from an act of commission (i.e., the fact that they did not exert initiative and action to promote justice in the midst of an ethical dilemma) and judge themselves instead on an act of omission, an act that is perceived to be “less unethical”.

There is a fundamental difference in the nature of the biases that drive the inconsistencies between action and recollection versus inconsistencies between prediction and action. Unlike in the prediction phase, in recollection we are often required to deal with knowledge of our outcomes, knowing that we behaved in line with our “want” self and not our “should” self. Cognitive distortions help us to manage these discrepancies between our past unethical behavior and our perceptions that we are ethical, distortions that are facilitated through the high-level, abstract construals particular to this post-hoc phase, selective memory processing that supports one’s self-image, self-enhancing attributions, the adjustment of ethical standards over time, and an egocentric adaptation of the omission bias. Because we know we behaved in line with our “want” self and what happened as a result of this behavior, the recollection process is one of restoring the “should” self by adjusting the importance of various aspects of the situation, selectively remembering pieces of the story, or persuading ourselves that our behavior was acceptable because it was within the “rules of the game” (i.e., “Everyone does it,” “I didn’t know someone would get hurt,” “I really believed what I was saying at the time,” etc.). Unfortunately, these distortions also allow these discrepancies to perpetuate. In the next section, we discuss how to align our “want” and “should” selves to break this destructive pattern.

Breaking the Cycle:

Recommendations for Aligning our “Want” and “Should” Selves

The misalignment between the “want” and “should” selves presents a significant barrier to improving ethical behavior. Effective decision-making requires accurate planning and reflection on one’s decision (Hammond, Keeney, & Raiffa, 2006). The inconsistencies that exist in the prediction, action, and recollection phases, however, circumvent these critical feedback loops. When we believe we are more ethical than is truly the case, we are unlikely to search for ways to improve our ethical behavior. In addition, people who view themselves as particularly moral sometimes exempt themselves from the moral standards to which they hold others (Ciulla, 2003).

Improving our ethical behavior thus requires us to direct our attention toward aligning our “want” and “should” selves. While some have argued that one needs to simply focus on controlling the emotional, impulsive “want” self (Kahneman, Ritov, Jacowitz & Grant, 1993; Schelling, 1984; Thaler, 1980), we agree with those who also see the value of identifying why the “want” self is at odds with the “should” self so that the two can act in closer concert (Bazerman et al., 1998; Loewenstein, 1996; Wilson & Schooler, 1991). In line with both perspectives, we examine how to bring the two selves together.

Recognizing the temporal trichotomy of prediction, action and recollection

According to Bazerman and Banaji (2004), to make more ethical decisions, people first need to recognize their own susceptibility to unconscious biases. This entails recognizing that our behavioral forecasts are incorrect, that our recollections of our past

behavior are subject to cognitive distortions, and that the roles of the “want” and “should” selves are misaligned. Mere awareness of these problems, though, is unlikely to be sufficient to correct them; the strategies outlined below likely are needed as well.

During prediction, listen to and incorporate the needs of the “want” self

Consistent with Bazerman et al. (1998), we believe that listening to and addressing the needs of the “want” self is an essential step in improving one’s decisions. The “want” self should be seen as a “negotiator who has the power to declare an impasse” (p. 236). Because the “want” self has the power to sabotage the “should” self’s best moral intentions, we need to learn to anticipate the “want” self’s behavior and create a plan to manage it. The process of listening to the “want” self includes making an effort to envision the point at which a decision must be made. Which features of the situation will be prominent? What motivations will be salient?

Diekmann and colleagues (2008) have shown that highlighting the motivations that people are likely to experience at the time they make a decision, but that are not salient when people forecast their behavior, does help to align their behavioral forecasts with actual behavior. When predicting how they would respond to a sexual harasser in a job interview context, forecasters who were induced to think about a nonsalient motivation (in this case, the motivation to “get the job”) were significantly less likely than those who were not so induced to predict that they would confront and battle the harasser and more likely to think they would behave like most people in the actual situation (i.e., not confront). Similarly, Trope and Liberman (2003) argued that, by rehearsing or practicing for future events (such as job talks or exams), individuals may be able to focus on the concrete details of the future situation that they normally overlook

when predicting from a distance. These procedures essentially force individuals to think about the future situation as if they were actually in it and hopefully help them to develop the metacognitive knowledge—or an understanding of effective strategies that can reconcile the two selves—that have been proven to be vital in self-regulation (Markus & Wurf, 1987). By doing so, people may be able to anticipate better what they would do and possibly identify ways to change their future behavior.

In the realm of ethical decision making, one way to bring the “want” self into the prediction phase is to anticipate its influence during the action phase and make a plan to address it. As teachers of ethics in negotiations, for example, we advise our students to try to curb their own unethical behavior by anticipating the questions the other party will ask and preparing an ethical response (i.e., preparing a response to the question, “Do you have any other offers?” and practicing that response so as to reduce impromptu lying). Similarly, during the prediction/preparation stage, identifying both the motivations that may surface during the action phase and the effective strategies that may be used to properly address these motivations will highlight the influence that the “want” self may have during that time, and give the decision maker time to prepare for the “want/should” battle.

During action, increase the influence of the “should” self

No matter what we do during the prediction phase, the “should” self needs to be able to flourish during the action phase if we are to improve our ethical behavior. This entails increasing the power of the “should” self during this phase while controlling that of the “want” self. To increase the “should” self’s power, we might take steps to make the action phase more like the prediction phase. Trope and Liberman (2003) suggested that

people may be able to focus on the high-level aspects of the situation (normally the focus only of our distant predictions or recollections) at the time of the decision. For example, Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez (1989) demonstrated that an effective way to overcome an immediate temptation (i.e., eating a tasty pretzel) is to refocus one's attention from the concrete qualities of the temptation (how yummy and tasty the pretzel is) to its abstract qualities (thinking of the pretzel as if it were a picture of a pretzel). Instead of focusing on the concrete details, one forms a higher-level construal of the tempting force and focuses on its more abstract qualities. In the domain of ethical decision making, when people are faced with a decision, they may be able to enact the "should" self by similarly focusing on the high-level aspects of the situation. For example, consuming limited natural resources can be thought of as an intergenerational tradeoff. When the decision is framed as such, people can take the long-term harm of consumption to the collective—including future generations—into account. This higher-level construal brings the influence of the "should" self back into the decision process.

We can also increase the prominence of the "should" self by changing the temporal distance between the decision and its consequences, specifically by delaying when the consequences of the outcome will be felt. Rogers and Bazerman (2007) emphasized that implementing long-term ethical action might require acceptance that we cannot get agreement if we try to implement decisions now (e.g., in Congress), but that our chances will go up if we accept a delay in implementation. Their work is consistent with Benartzi and Thaler (2004), who show that it is far easier to get employees to start saving for retirement if you ask them to agree now to implement the decision later than if you seek an immediate take-home-pay reduction now. Rogers and Bazerman (2007) even

show that an emphasis on “implementing later” rather than “voting now” is sufficient to get a substantial increase in the willingness to support “should” (ethical) choices. Thus, providing managers with longer decision horizons (i.e., bonuses based on a three-year rolling window of profits versus quarter end) may allow for an increased presence of the “should” self at the time of action, resulting in more accurate financial statements.

The “should” self will also be more likely to dominate during the action phase if options are evaluated simultaneously versus sequentially (Bazerman et al., 1998). Individuals evaluating options simultaneously, for example, have been found more likely to choose a public good, such as an improvement in air quality (the “should” choice), over a commodity such as a printer (the “want” choice); however, when rating these items separately on willingness-to-pay, the printer was rated higher (Irwin, Slovic, Lichtenstein, & McClelland, 1993). Similarly, Lowenthal (1996) found that in the comparison between a political candidate of integrity and one that would provide more jobs, individuals rated the job-providing candidate higher but chose the integrity candidate when asked to vote between the two. In ethical dilemmas, we should envision two choices before us – the ethical choice and the unethical choice. Doing so allows us to see that in choosing the unethical action, we are not choosing the ethical act. Not doing so allows the ethical choice to hide in the background and helps to fade just how unethical the unethical choice is.

Focusing on how to halt and reverse the process in which ethical fading leads to the suppression of the “should” self may also help make the “should” self more salient. Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) argued that ethical fading is partially activated by situational factors that must be addressed in order to improve ethical decision-making.

The ethical infrastructure that surrounds the decision context—including accompanying formal and informal communication and sanctioning systems and the organizational climates of justice, ethics, and respect—is an important situational variable to consider, particularly in organizational contexts (Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe & Umphress, 2003). The features of the decision itself are also highlighted as essential elements in the fading process, including the linguistic phrases used to describe the decision (Bandura, 1999; Bok, 1989; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Uncertainty has been identified as another factor that influences the ethical fading process (Bazerman et al., 1998; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). The less uncertainty there is present in the decision environment (i.e., in consequences, in affected parties), the less likely it is that the “want” and “should” self will diverge (Bazerman et al., 1998; Sonenshein, 2007). Uncertainty allows the “want” self to focus on the aspects of the situation that support it (i.e., “this may not be unethical”) and hence give it more life, increasing the probability that an unethical act will be committed. The “should” self should thus be more likely to take an active role during the action phase when uncertainty is reduced.

During action, decrease the influence of the “want” self

In an ethical dilemma, when people understand that their “want” selves will drive their decisions, they may be able to use self-control strategies directed at that self (see Trope & Fishbach, 2000; Strotz, 1956; Thaler & Shefrin, 1981). Part of this strategy may involve pre-commitment devices (Schelling, 1984). Rather than focusing on the “should” self, these devices seek to suppress the rearing of the “want” self. Ashraf, Karlan and Yin (2006) found, for example, that rural Philippine villagers who saved their money by putting it in inaccessible low-cost lock boxes were able to save more money than those

who did not. Though a small price was paid to constrain the “want” self, doing so eliminated the ability of that self to use the money for immediate gratification, allowing the “should” self to flourish.

When faced with an ethical dilemma, similar pre-commitment devices can be used to suppress the “want” self. Research on escalation of commitment shows that individuals who publicly commit to a course of action are more likely to follow that course of action (see Brockner & Rubin, 1985; Staw & Ross, 1987). Pre-committing to a neutral, high-integrity individual who is important to you that you fully intend to make the ethical choice will induce escalation of commitment, thus thwarting the “want” self and reducing the likelihood that you will renege on that statement at the time of the decision. Results from Shiv and Fedorikhin (1999) suggest that increasing the cognitive resources available to the decision maker should also decrease the prominence of the “want” self. In a study investigating consumer choice, they found that when individuals’ processing resources were constrained, they were more likely to choose to purchase the affectively-laden versus cognitively-laden item. More specifically, participants who were asked to memorize a seven-digit number were more likely to choose to purchase chocolate cake (the affectively-laden choice) but when they were asked to only memorize a two-digit number, they were more likely to choose to purchase a fruit salad (the cognitive choice). They use these results to suggest that impulse buying will be more prevalent when shoppers are distracted. Extrapolating these results to an ethical dilemma, the force of our impulsive “want” self can be mitigated if we analyze ethical dilemmas in a non-distracting environment that allows for deeper-level processing.

During recollection, recognize the likelihood of distortions

As the distortions that occur in the recollection phase allow us to continue to believe that our actions were more ethical than they were and, in turn, that we are more ethical than we actually are, it is important to recognize that such recollections are biased. Such a meta-awareness and corresponding debiasing is thus important but, unfortunately, quite difficult (Fischhoff, 1982; Bazerman & Moore, 2008). However, training that involves teaching decision makers about the possible biases to which they are susceptible as well as instructing them to use techniques such as “consider the opposite” has received some success (Larrick, 2004; Mussweiler, Strack, & Pfeiffer, 2000). Feedback has also been identified as being important in the debiasing process (Lichtenstein and Fischhoff, 1980). Indeed, Fischhoff (1982) suggests that successful debiasing involves providing warnings about the likelihood of bias and a description of the direction of the bias followed by a process which includes feedback and training. Larrick (2004) suggests that effective debiasing strategies need to be targeted specifically toward the bias and the context, with any feedback occurring soon after the bias occurs. In addition to training and feedback, the use of groups and accountability has also been identified as useful in the debiasing process (Larrick, 2004; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999).

Unlike our previous recommendations which focus on the strategies that we can use to align our “want” and “should” selves in the prediction and action phases, the difficulty in debiasing means that correcting our distortions in the recollection phase will most likely involve training by others who can help us identify and correct the distortions. Such training, rather than focusing only on normative principles, needs to recognize the psychological mechanisms that lead to unethical behavior and the recollection of such behavior (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). It is important that we

recognize that such distortions occur and that training for reducing such distortions should be sought out, even if we don't think that we need it.

Where to Go From Here: Directions for Future Research

While the strategies we propose should help reduce the unethical behavior resulting from the intersection of the “want/should” conflict and the temporal trichotomy of prediction, action and recollection, more research is needed so that we can understand how to achieve even better results. Some of this research involves understanding the forces that allow one self to dominate the other so that additional prescriptions for controlling and even reversing this domination can be identified. Recognizing that both the “want” and “should” selves are probably here to stay, we hope that future research will investigate how to manage these two discordant selves.

One area for future research is to further understand what forces prompt the “want” and “should” selves to dominate one's momentary self-conception. Promising directions for such an endeavor are offered by investigating factors that enhance or diminish ethical fading which in turn leads to the differential activation of the “want” versus “should” self. Factors found to influence moral awareness is a good start for such research, including ethical experience, orientation, issue intensity, and ethical culture (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Future research should also seek to gain knowledge on how to give a non-dominant self more weight. Bazerman et al. (1998) argue that the “should” self should listen to the “want” self during the prediction phase; additionally, we have asserted that we need to better understand how to warn the “should” self that it will be ignored during the action phase

and, in the recollection phase, how to recognize the role that the “want” self played in our actions. Part of this understanding may come from understanding how to debias our decision making (Bazerman & Moore, 2008). While de-biasing has proven to be difficult, work on this area should nonetheless continue so that we can not only be more fully aware of the “want/should” conflict, but also our inability to “naturally” manage it in a manner that is consistent with our ethical ideals.

Future research that addresses the co-existence of both selves in unethical decision making also offers promise. This work could draw from new thinking about the cognition versus emotion debate, work which suggests that moral decision making is best informed by a dual-processing model that encompasses both cognitions and emotions (Reynolds, 2006; Stanovich & West, 2000; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). Rather than engage in a debate about whether cognitions or emotions rule ethical decision making, this framework argues that they operate in conjunction with one another (Cushman, Young & Hauser, 2006; Damasio, 1994; Reynolds, 2006). The challenge of this research--to specify how these processes fit together-- is in line with the fundamental challenge outlined in this paper, namely to understand how the “want” and “should” selves can co-exist; consequently, future research could benefit from drawing on this field of work.

New technologies may also prove to be useful for further understanding how the “want/should” conflict plays out over time. Recent research, for example, has used MRIs to identify areas of the brain that are more active when moral versus amoral decisions are being considered (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Moll, 2001; Moll, de Oliveira-Souza, Bramati, & Grafman, 2002; Moll, de Oliveira-

Souza, Eslinger, et al., 2002; Moll, de Oliveira-Souza, Moll, Ignacio, Bramati, Caparelli-Daquer et al., 2005). Knutson, Rick, Wimmer, Prelec and Loewenstein (2007) have also used this technology to examine purchase decisions, finding that price dictated which parts of the brain (i.e., the insular cortex, associated with the anticipation of pain and monetary loss, versus the medial prefrontal cortex, a region associated with rational analysis) are active during purchase. Future research should be able to take advantage of this and similar imaging technologies to determine whether different parts of the brain are more associated with “want” versus “should” self-domination, information that would seem particularly useful when such differential activation operates without the decision-maker’s awareness.

Conclusion

The extent of the negative response to the scandals of this decade has been encouraging. Individuals and corporations are eager to understand why they happened and how to prevent them from reoccurring. Unfortunately, the focus of this response has been less than energizing. Efforts have focused on how to “correct” the organization through formal systems, such as ethics codes and training (Joseph, 2003), with little or no attention paid to the individual faced with the ethical dilemma. As Tenbrunsel and Messick (2004) highlight, a consideration of the psychological processes of the decision maker offers great promise but unfortunately, this perspective has been neglected from the current “fix-it” paradigm. The current effort to curb unethical behavior “ignores the innate tendency for the individual to engage in self-deception” (p. 224), an error which substantially negates any systematic efforts at the organization level.

This paper was intended to bring the psychological processes of the individual decision-maker to the forefront by examining the self-deception that is inherent in the beliefs about one's own (un)ethical behavior. Individuals deceive themselves that they are ethical people and the continuation of this belief allows for the perpetuity of unethical behavior. We hope that by examining the interplay of the "want/should" selves through a temporal lens, we shed light on these false beliefs and break their defeating cycle.

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