Evaluating ethical decision-making models: a review and application

Nathan C. Whittier, Scott Williams and Todd C. Dewett
Raj Soin College of Business, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, USA

Abstract
Purpose – The paper seeks to evaluate the prescriptive value of ethical decision-making models.
Design/methodology/approach – The paper explores various types of models in the ethics literature in concert with knowledge from the decision sciences literature to develop a tentative list of evaluative criteria that might be applied to prescriptive models. It then applies these criteria to one prescriptive model from the ethics literature, developed by Petrick and Quinn, in an attempt to demonstrate the value of more comprehensive evaluation. It closes by considering future research aimed at the evaluation of ethical decision-making models as well as research needed to validate the Petrick and Quinn model.
Findings – This critique finds that the Petrick-Quinn judgment integrity model satisfies most of the criteria discussed in the ethical decision-making literature. The primary opportunities for refining the Petrick-Quinn model as a prescriptive framework for ethical decision making are: articulating the operational judgment component of the model as a formal, quantitative decision analysis, and conducting research to assess the real-world utility of the model.
Originality/value – While there has been a proliferation of research concerning business ethics, little attention has been focused on evaluating the utility of ethical decision-making models. Accordingly, this paper advances theory, research and practice regarding ethical decision making in organizations.
Keywords Decision making, Modelling, Ethics
Paper type Conceptual paper

In recent years there has been a steady production of ethics related research in the organizational literature. A subset of this research has specifically focused on the development of ethical decision-making models. Subsequently, several authors and models have gained some level of prominence (Jones, 1991; Trevino, 1986). Nonetheless, there have been scarcely any empirical studies designed to investigate the validity of ethical decision-making models. Consequently, as the overall body of ethics related work continues to grow, the gap between theory and practice is expanding. Thus, our major contention is that models of ethical decision making must not only be theoretically sound, but also practically valuable (Steers et al., 2004). Assessing prescriptive utility requires a more systematic approach to model assessment than has been undertaken in the extant literature to date.

In short, we wish to use the existing literature to build a set of criteria that can be used to evaluate the adequacy of ethical decision-making models. Specifically, we are interested in the judgment aspect: the aspect that Rest’s (1986) four-step model (awareness-judgment-intention-behavior) refers to as “moral judgment,” and Trevino (1986, p. 602) refers to as “the individual’s process of deciding what is right or wrong in
a situation." Subsequently, we will apply these criteria to one ethical judgment model in particular in an effort to demonstrate the utility of the evaluative process.

The challenge of evaluating models of ethical decision making becomes apparent when one realizes the qualitatively different forms that models often assume. Three types of models in particular dominate the literature. A normative model of ethical decision making emphasizes the way in which decision makers should ideally perform the activities in the decision-making process (Kleindorfer et al., 1993). In contrast, descriptive models of ethical decision making consider empirical evidence regarding how decision makers actually perform the activities in the decision-making process. Finally, prescriptive models of ethical decision making consider empirical evidence in an attempt to help decision makers improve their decision-making performance given the complex context in which decisions are made. Though our interest is ultimately prescriptive (applied) in nature, we will draw on well-known examples of all three types of models in an attempt to assemble a viable list of evaluative criteria that might be used in the assessment of any given model.

Given the paucity of research examining the validity of ethical decision-making models, we found it beneficial to expand our literature review to include work in the decision sciences arena. Although some criteria have been suggested in work directly addressing ethical decision-making models (Jones, 1991; Bartlett, 2003), it is clear that additional bases for evaluation will be required to provide a thorough analysis of a model’s comprehensiveness and utility. Below, we begin a more explicit consideration of criteria that might be used to evaluate an ethical decision-making model.

Critically evaluating ethical decision-making models

Few authors have explicitly identified criteria for evaluating ethical decision-making models. In addition, scores of ethical decision-making approaches and models exist. For our purposes, we will examine one of the seminal works (Jones, 1991) as well as the insights from recent reviews (Bartlett, 2003; Kelley and Elm, 2003) as we consider what criteria might be used to evaluate different models. The seminal article that informs our analysis is on the “issue contingent” model proposed by Jones (1991), which may provide the most comprehensive synthesis of ethical decision making to date (Loe et al., 2000). A careful examination of the Jones model should provide insight into how one can evaluate the utility of an ethical decision-making model. However, we do not wish to focus myopically on Jones’ (1991) work. Thus, we will also draw from Bartlett’s (2003) and Kelley and Elm’s (2003) reviews of the ethical decision-making literature to identify several additional criteria worth considering.

Jones (1991) proposes that an ethical decision-making model must be “issue-contingent” such that it explicitly considers the characteristics of the moral issue itself. He refers to moral intensity, which is comprised of six components:

(1) magnitude of consequences;
(2) social consensus;
(3) probability of effect;
(4) temporal immediacy;
(5) proximity; and
(6) concentration of effect.
Magnitude of consequences is defined as the total harm/benefit resulting from the moral action in question. Social consensus of the moral issue is defined as the degree of agreement that an alternative is evil or good. The probability of effect refers to the probability that the action will take place and will cause the harm/benefit expected. Temporal immediacy is defined as the time between the present and the consequences of the moral action. Proximity refers to the feeling of closeness that the moral agent has for the victims/beneficiaries of the action in question. Finally, concentration of effect of the moral act is defined as the “inverse function” of the number of individuals affected by a given act.

Limited empirical research has been conducted pertaining to the Jones (1991) model. Singer et al. (1998) completed two studies examining the assertion that ethical decision-making is contingent upon the perceived intensity of the moral issue. Their results supported the Jones (1991) model and provide convergent support for the issue-contingent nature of ethical decision making. Additionally, Jones (1991, p. 373) states that content validity can be claimed based on:

...the observation that (a) moral intensity varies from issue to issue, (b) individuals can make judgments of moral intensity, and (c) these judgments, although often subject to error and systematic bias, are sufficiently accurate for a person to make critical distinctions.

In his critique of current ethical decision-making models, Bartlett (2003) identifies several ways in which current models can be improved. First, the author argues that an increased emphasis be placed on ecological validity, that is, models must reflect “real-life” situations. For example, he states that much of the current literature in business ethics focuses on philosophical theory to the neglect of behavioral intentions and the beliefs that shape these intentions. Additionally, he states that current literature takes either an “undersocialized” view (e.g. ignores social context) or “oversocialized” view (e.g. ignores individual factors) of ethics and that decision-making models need to focus their attention somewhere between these two extremes (2003, p. 225).

Bartlett (2003) states that the wide focus of existing models of ethical decision making leads to the difficulties associated with integration. The author calls for a greater focus on the actual processes of decision making, including an investigation of the cognitions which describe the ethical decision-making process. Finally, Bartlett contends that the situation or context in which the decision is being made should be explicitly considered.

In their review of the Jones (1991) model, Kelley and Elm (2003) call for an increased focus on the organizational factors affecting the decision-makers’ experience of the ethical issue. Jones (1991, p. 391) asserts that organizational factors affect “moral decision making and behavior at two points: establishing moral intent and engaging in moral behavior”. However, Kelley and Elm (2003) contend that this formulation minimizes that impact of organizational factors on the experience of the ethical issue. Moreover, Kelley and Elm’s (2003) data from the social service context suggests that organizational factors directly impact the moral intensity of the ethical issue rather than only the moral intent and moral behavior of the decision maker.

This brief review of Jones (1991), Bartlett (2003) and Kelley and Elm (2003) provides insights regarding the key characteristics of ethical decision-making models, and thus criteria by which a model might be judged. First, they agree that an adequate model...
should account for both individual and contextual forces involved in the decision-making process. Similarly, they recognize the importance of the cognitive processes that are involved in ethical decision making. Finally, Bartlett’s argument for an increased emphasis on ecological validity appears to be consistent with Jones’ call for an increased focus on the characteristics of the moral issue itself and Kelley and Elm’s argument regarding the importance of context.

While very valuable, the Jones (1991) model and the Bartlett (2003) and Kelley and Elm (2003) reviews do not provide an adequately comprehensive set of criteria for evaluating ethical decision-making models. Primarily, this is due to a descriptive orientation rather than a prescriptive orientation. That is, Jones’ work and the work analyzed by Bartlett and Kelley and Elm primarily address models describing the forces that actually influence ethical decision making in organizations. In contrast, our interest is prescriptive in nature – we seek to understand how models can be used to help managers improve their engagement of the decision-making process. As a result of a descriptive approach, these two works do not directly address the judgment aspect of ethical decision making, a prime concern in the current paper. That is, they offer the practitioner no prescriptions for decision making.

Jones’ (1991) emphasis on descriptive theory, as opposed to prescriptive, can be detected in his discussion of moral intensity. The six components of moral intensity can be seen as descriptive characteristics of the moral act in question. The model then suggests that the moral intensity of the ethical issue significantly affects moral decision making and subsequent behavior. In short, it appears that Jones attempts to describe the processes involved in actual decision making without offering suggestions for helping decision makers in this process.

Stated differently, Jones (1991) focuses on ethical decision making in a broad sense, sacrificing detailed attention to the judgment component. Although the author does contend that the six components of moral intensity are directly related to judgments of the importance of moral issues, he does not provide evidence (empirical or otherwise) for this claim. More general models of decision making contend that problem context; perceived problem state; problem identification, representation, and acceptance; and problem solving are essential aspects of the decision-making process (Kleindorfer et al., 1993). Jones’ (1991) issue-contingent model is consistent with this such that it considers context and acceptance; however, it does not describe how good judgment can be achieved. Similarly, Kelley and Elm’s (2003) revision of the issue-contingent model is descriptive in nature such that it emphasizes the significant impact of context on moral intensity. Finally, Bartlett’s (2003) emphasis on descriptive, rather than prescriptive, models of ethical decision making is evident in his discussion of the theory-practice gap in the literature. However, he does acknowledge the need for an investigation into the cognitive processes and specific cognitions involved in the decision-making process, suggesting that he considers the judgment component of decision making important.

Prior critiques of ethical decision-making models have not provided a complete set of criteria for critiquing a prescriptive ethical judgment model. Consequently, we will consider criteria for assessing normative models for ethical decision making and judgment models of various sorts (not just ethical judgment). Many evaluative criteria can be derived from the ethics literature, however, as we have noted throughout, this body of work has not systematically examined the need to evaluate ethical models. As a
result, we will also draw on the decision sciences literature – an area of study with a more cogent history of critiquing decision-making models.

Normative ethics theories
While descriptive theories explain how decision makers tend to make decisions, normative theories propose how decisions should be made. Accordingly, a superior normative ethical decision-making model must incorporate the appropriate set of ethical ideals. Ironically, justification of ethical ideals in the ethics literature largely comes from descriptive observations of the way things are. For example, Schumann (2001) argues that the most appropriate set of ethical values are those used most commonly by individuals. This position is consistent with Bartlett’s (2003) call for an increase in the ecological validity of ethical decision-making models. Spurgin (2004) suggests that the most appropriate set of ethical values consists of those representing the dominant paradigm of Western ethicists. Similarly, others have suggested that the most appropriate set of ethical values consists of those that have been most widely studied (Cavanagh et al., 1981; Schumann, 2001). Finally, Schumann (2001) also states that a set of ethical values is most appropriate when diverse perspectives are represented. This is perhaps the purest normative argument because it states what should be considered without overt reference to what tends to be considered.

Several authors have identified various sets of ethical values which they believe to be most important. Spurgin (2004) identifies relativist, egoist, utilitarian, Kantian, Rawlsian, and libertarian theories as those which must be known to demonstrate competency in business ethics. Cavanagh et al. (1981) identifies utilitarian, rights (e.g. Kant), and justice (e.g. Rawls) theories as relevant to ethical decision making. Similarly, Schumann (2001) and Velasquez et al. (1996) also advocate for the use of utilitarian, rights, and justice theories; however, they also extend the range of ethical values that should be considered by including principles related to caring and virtues. Finally, Geva (2000) advocates for the use of utilitarianism, deontology, and justice theories in making moral decisions. Although subtle differences exist between the ethical values supported by various authors, considerable overlap is evident. Utilitarian, rights, and justice theories are generally identified as primary among the normative ethics theories.

In short, a satisfactory ethical judgment model (a prescriptive model) will incorporate at least the utilitarian, rights, and justice moral values. Given the lack of fully articulated criteria for evaluating judgment models, we turn below to the decision sciences to gain a broader perspective on decision making.

Decision sciences models
A leading figure in the decision sciences is Nobel Laureate Herbert A. Simon. Simon (1979) states that the essential characteristic of a decision-making model is that, it is capable of actually making or recommending decisions. He goes on to state that the data to be used in such models should consist of information that is available in the “real world” and should require calculation that can be “reasonably” performed. Simon (1979, p. 498) advocates models formed with practicality in mind regardless of the “approximations and simplifications imposed on them.”

The subject of prescriptive aids for evaluating alternative courses of action is a topic of study in the decision sciences. Two such prescriptive aids include procedural guides
and decision aids. Procedural guides and decision aids are said to include prescriptive measures to direct and enhance the decision-making process. For example, Kleindorfer et al. (1993) indicate that a good judgment procedural guide is one which clarifies goals, values, and needs. Examples of such prescriptive aids could range from simple checklists to complicated decision support systems utilizing highly developed information technology and/or quantitative models.

The field of decision sciences also suggests that “decision analysis” can improve decision making. Decision analysis is “a structure for representing the decision situation and a mathematical procedure for prescribing the alternative action that is most consistent with what is known and what one values” (Narayan et al., 2003, p. 230). Formal decision analysis involves determining quantitative values of the expected outcomes of alternative courses of action. The alternative with the most favorable expected outcomes is suggested to be the superior alternative. Decision analysis can also be used informally by applying the structure and processes without the mathematical calculations. Bazerman (1986) contends that decision analysis can be used in times of uncertainty to help combine the knowledge and judgment of a variety of sources in an attempt to make the best possible decision. Additionally, the use of decision analysis can reduce the decision maker’s vulnerability to unwanted biases in the decision-making process.

In sum, the literature from the fields of ethics and the decision sciences has provided us with several criteria with which to evaluate ethical decision-making models. First, the criteria suggested by Jones (1991) include the explicit consideration of the moral issue itself (e.g. moral intensity). Additional criteria gleaned from Bartlett (2003) include a focus on ecological validity or “real-world” applicability, explicit consideration of the context in which the decision is being made, and an integration of individual and organizational factors involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, Kelley and Elm (2003) concur with Bartlett (2003) regarding the importance of the context in which the decision is being made. There also appears to be a consensus in the ethics literature that a prescriptive model for ethical judgment must minimally include utilitarian, rights and justice moral values. Criteria suggested from the review of the decision sciences literature include the actual capability of recommending decisions (Simon, 1979); the ability to clarify goals, values, and needs in an effort to enhance decision making (Kleindorfer et al., 1993); and the ability to combine the knowledge and judgment of a variety of sources in an attempt to make the best decision possible (Bazerman, 1986). These criteria are summarized in Table I. We will now utilize these criteria to evaluate the adequacy of the Petrick-Quinn model as a prescriptive theory that can assist decision makers in the real-world.

Petrick-Quinn integrity capacity model
Petrick and Quinn (2000) propose the construct of integrity capacity as a framework for examining and working out behavioral, moral, legal, and economic complexity in business ethics issues at both individual and collective levels. A detailed discussion of much of their integrity capacity model is presented in their text, management ethics: integrity at work (Petrick and Quinn, 1997). The model was further developed in two Journal of Business Ethics articles, “The integrity capacity construct and moral progress in business” (Petrick and Quinn, 2000) and “The challenge of leadership accountability for integrity capacity as a strategic asset” (Petrick and Quinn, 2001).
Petrick (2004) also provided an application of and elaboration on judgment integrity capacity in the articles “Sustainability, democracy and three challenges to judgment integrity capacity” and “The Enron scandal and the neglect of management integrity capacity” (Petrick and Scherer, 2003).

Integrity capacity is comprised of four components (Petrick and Quinn, 2000):

1. process integrity capacity;
2. judgment integrity capacity;
3. developmental integrity capacity; and
4. systems integrity capacity.

The judgment integrity capacity component is the facet of their model that is of direct concern in the current paper. We are examining the extent to which it can be utilized as a prescriptive model in ethical judgment situations. While we are limiting the scope of our assessment to the judgment component, the four components of the Petrick-Quinn model are somewhat interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Thus, it is recommended that the reader review Petrick and Quinn (2000), as the current discussion is best understood in the context of the complete model.

Judgment integrity capacity is defined as “… the balanced use of key ethics theories and their cognate theoretical resources in the analysis and resolution of individual and/or collective moral issues” (Petrick and Quinn, 2000, p. 6). The authors go on to
state that judgment integrity capacity is influenced by the degree of behavioral, moral, economic, and legal complexity of a given situation and they advocate the use of management, ethics, economic, and legal theories to handle this complexity.

A consideration of the various management, economic, and legal theories is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the ethics theories utilized in the Petrick-Quinn model will be considered. These authors propose the use of teleological, deontological, virtue, and system development ethics theories with regard to judgment integrity capacity. For example, demonstrating judgment integrity capacity involves accountability for attaining good results (e.g. teleological ethics), adhering to the correct rules (e.g. deontological ethics), cultivating sound character (e.g. virtue ethics), and creating an ethically supportive context (e.g. system development ethics) (Petrick and Quinn, 2001). The acronym for their approach is R²C², the two R's refer to results and rules while the two C's refer to character and context (J. Petrick, personal communication, January 7, 2005). Furthermore, they state that an overemphasis or underemphasis on any one ethics theory will damage business judgment and prevent individuals and groups from making balanced and inclusive decisions that effectively deal with moral complexity (Petrick, 2004; Petrick and Quinn, 2000).

Although Petrick and Quinn did not expressly state that their integrity capacity model was prescriptive, the following critique indicates that it satisfies many of the criteria for prescriptive models. The critique focuses primarily on the judgment integrity component, but recognizes that judgment integrity was presented in the context of a multi-faceted integrity capacity model.

Critique of the Petrick-Quinn model

As noted in Table I, the ethics and decisions sciences literatures suggest several criteria for critiquing ethical judgment models. Below we will briefly subject the Petrick and Quinn (2000) model to an evaluation based on these criteria. Jones (1991) contends that ethical decision-making models must include explicit consideration of the moral intensity of the issue itself. Moral intensity largely focuses on aspects of the potential outcomes of ethical decisions. The Petrick-Quinn model adequately addresses moral intensity because of its inclusion of teleological ethics theories which address most of the facets of moral intensity (magnitude of consequences, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, and concentration of effect). In addition, their work suggests that businesses demonstrate judgment integrity capacity by adhering to standards of right conduct (duty-oriented deontological ethics). To the extent that standards of right conduct are determined not only by laws and regulations but also by a tacit or explicit understanding among internal and external stakeholders, the social consensus standard has been met as well. Thus, the model satisfies Jones’ (1991) criterion. However, it is not as clear that the model directly addresses the “proximity” facet of moral intensity, except indirectly through the development of emotional virtues (e.g. care, compassion, and empathy) which allow agents to vicariously imagine the “nearness” of moral conflicts and harms.

Bartlett (2003) cautions against the “undersocialized” approach to studying ethical decision making and argues that models must consider the social context in which the decision is being made. The Petrick-Quinn model satisfies this criterion very well. It suggests that an ethical course of action enhances the intra-organizational and extra-organizational contexts of the decision.
Bartlett (2003) also contends that models of ethical decision making must integrate individual and organization factors involved in the decision-making process. Petrick and Quinn’s (2000) broader model of integrity capacity, of which judgment integrity capacity is one of four components, recognizes the crucial role of individual and organizational factors in bringing about ethical behavior. Systems integrity capacity addresses the extent to which organizational and extraorganizational systems support ethical behavior. Developmental integrity capacity addresses individual and collective moral development. In the sustainability article, Petrick (2004) grounds the R^2C^2 approach in the human reality theory of four competing drives: the drive to acquire, defend, bond, and learn. He argues that the moral focus on results is linked to the human drive to acquire, the moral focus on rules to the drive to defend, the moral focus on character to the drive to bond, and the moral focus on context to the drive to learn. Distorted moral judgments reflect and often influence dehumanization trends that over express or under express four of the natural human drives. However, there is no published work on how to operationalize the linkage. Moreover, the Petrick-Quinn model does not address the full range of individual difference factors that other models have addressed (Trevino, 1986). However, a comprehensive list of individual factors might not be necessary for a prescriptive ethical judgment model. We revisit this issue below.

Kleindorfer et al. (1993) note that a good judgment procedural guide clarifies and prioritizes the decision maker’s goals and values. Overall, when considering the published work, the model obliquely addresses goals and values (i.e. drives), but it is not exactly clear how they are adequately satisfied. Future work extending the Petrick and Quinn (2000) model could do more to prescriptively help decision makers prioritize and operationalize moral decision making to meet human goals, values and drives – for example, by articulating a formal, quantitative decision analysis (e.g. a decision tree).

Schumann (2001) contends that ethical decision-making frameworks should include the primary moral values. The three most studied in Western philosophy and commonly mentioned in the business ethics literature are utilitarian moral values, rights moral values and justice moral values. Petrick and Quinn’s (1997) text elaborates on the judgment integrity framework and integrates an extensive set of moral principles: ethical egoism, utilitarianism, eudaimonism (results); negative rights, positive rights, social contracts, social justice (rules); individual character, work character and professional character (character); and, personal improvement, organizational improvement, extraorganizational improvement (context). Petrick and Quinn (2000) contend that an ethical decision is one that effectively balances utilitarianism, rights and justice as well as several other moral values.

Bazerman (1986) explains that judgment models should combine the knowledge and judgment of a variety of sources in an attempt to make the best decision possible. Although this has not been a primary thrust of the work by Petrick and Quinn (2000, p. 6), it is notable that the authors state that process integrity capacity requires “being receptive to the input of multiple stakeholders”. Obtaining input from multiple stakeholders is a process issue with implications for judgment. While the Enron article (Petrick and Scherer, 2003) identifies the moral concerns, harms, and remedies of primary, secondary, and tertiary stakeholders, more applications are needed.
Simon (1979) notes that decision-making models should be capable of recommending decisions. It is not clear that Petrick and Quinn’s (2000) model is successful in terms of recommendations. That is, Petrick and Quinn (2000) stated that decision makers must attend to and balance the competing moral values in order to act ethically. There was no overt attempt to make the model concretely and quantitatively guide readers through particular decisions. However, Petrick and Quinn (1997) provided some general guidance by identifying and graphically demonstrating the “negative zones” of decisions that either under- or overemphasize one or more of the moral values. For instance, an overemphasis on “moral rules” can stifle progress. However, the procedures to quantitatively and graphically operationalize positive and negative zones of particular prescriptive decisions have not been published to date.

Finally, a prescriptive model of ethical judgment must be applicable in the “real world.” Bartlett (2003) asserts that normative models dominate the business ethics literature, and he questions their ecological validity. Prescriptive decision-making models must use realistically attainable and analyzable data (Simon, 1979). Petrick and Quinn have not established the ecological validity of their judgment integrity model. It appears realistic that decision makers could obtain and process data bearing on results, rights, character and context. However, future research is needed to establish the wide range of real-world utility of the Petrick-Quinn model. We return to this issue in the following section.

In summary, our critique of the Petrick-Quinn model is generally favorable. As noted in Table II, the model addresses the key elements of Jones’ (1991) moral intensity construct. It attends to individual, organizational and contextual factors involved in the decision situation. The model calls attention to the important values bearing on a decision, particularly the primary moral values identified in Western philosophy. It combines information from a variety of sources and can be instrumental in recommending a decision.

It is important to note that two of the four limitations of the model identified by our critique are not particularly vital. First, the Petrick-Quinn model does not directly address the proximity component of Jones’ (1991) moral intensity construct. It attends to individual, organizational and contextual factors involved in the decision situation. The model calls attention to the important values bearing on a decision, particularly the primary moral values identified in Western philosophy. It combines information from a variety of sources and can be instrumental in recommending a decision.

Our critique finds that the primary opportunities for refining the Petrick-Quinn judgment integrity model as a prescriptive framework for ethical decision-making are:

- articulating the operational judgment component of the model as a formal, quantitative decision analysis (i.e. Simon’s (1979) requirement that a model be able to make a recommendation); and
- conducting research to assess the real-world utility of the model (i.e. Bartlett’s (2003) concern for ecological validity).

We discuss these issues in more detail below.
Discussion
This paper contributes to the ethical decision-making literature by generating a list of evaluative criteria for critiquing prescriptive ethical judgment models, applying the criteria to critique the Petrick-Quinn judgment integrity model, and also by identifying needs for future research. We reviewed the literature on ethical judgment models and gleaned a list of criteria stated or implied there. This list was supplemented by a review of the decision sciences literature bearing on prescriptive models. Seven criteria were identified, but two criteria were called into question as use of those criteria in an actual critique revealed that they may be of limited importance.

Next, we applied the criteria to one model in particular, the Petrick-Quinn (2000) model of judgment integrity capacity. Overall, their work appears quite sound when evaluated against the set of evaluative concerns. Nonetheless, we believe it can be enhanced in at least two ways. First, articulating the judgment model as a formal, quantitative decision analysis would provide much needed operational guidance in making ethical decisions that Petrick and Quinn (2000) readily acknowledge are complex and often perceived by laypeople as being without “right” answers. Quantitatively operationalizing moral judgment analysis helps decision makers manage complexity and uncertainty by encouraging them to consider a larger number of alternatives and evaluating those alternatives more precisely than they would with an unstructured decision-making process. Even under conditions of uncertainty, systematic analysis of decisions leads to higher decision quality (Eisenhardt, 1989).

### Table II.
Adequacy of the Petrick and Quinn model based on the criteria in Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Adequacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should explicitly consider the characteristics of the moral issue in and of itself</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should have a focus on real-world applicability or ecological validity</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should explicitly consider the situation and/or context in which the decision is being made</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should integrate individual and organizational factors involved in the decision-making process</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prescriptive model for ethical decision making should represent diverse perspectives while representing those ethics theories that are considered to be primary in the literature (e.g. utilitarian, rights, and justice moral values)</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should have the capability of actually recommending decisions</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should possess the ability to clarify goals, values, and needs in an effort to enhance decision making</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical decision-making models should have the capability to combine the knowledge and judgment of a variety of sources to help decision makers make the best possible choice</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
identifying decision criteria, identifying alternative courses of action, analyzing each alternative, selecting and implementing the best alternative, and evaluating the outcomes (Robbins and DeCenzo, 1998). Decision criteria would include business outcomes and moral values.

Second, whether a model like the Petrick-Quinn judgment integrity capacity model can serve as an effective prescriptive model is ultimately an empirical question. After articulating the model, experimental examination of individuals’ abilities to learn and use it productively must be conducted. Empirical analyses of their work can follow either of two general paths. First, field survey research directed at practicing managers can be designed to capture the extent to which, for example, managers rely on different ethics theories to guide their moral decisions (e.g. teleological versus deontological) and whether applying the Petrick-Quinn model significantly expands and balances their analyses. Second, laboratory studies would provide a more controlled alternative than field research. In a laboratory setting, either using paper and pencil or computer-based approaches, subjects can be exposed to ethical decision-making vignettes followed by questions designed to capture issues relevant to their managerial styles and default ethical theories in use. The possible combinations of variables and manipulations, which variables serve as dependent variables, and so on, are nearly unlimited. Our point is to simply note the need for empirical work to test core tenants of the model.

While the business ethics literature has seen tremendous growth in recent years, there remains a clear need to improve our focus on evaluating the efficacy of ethics-related decision-making models. We hope the effort provided here can spur additional interest both in more systematically understanding the process of evaluating such models and in further empirical research to substantiate Petrick and Quinn’s (2000) promising theoretical work.

References


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