Understanding for Moral Decision Making: A Conceptual Model for Linking Values, Discernment and Outcome Perception

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Abstract

The need for educational leaders to be conscious of the values influencing the morality of their decisions and for a way of guiding them as ethical educators emerged from the authors' research into leadership decisions involving the use of student achievement data. A conceptual framework is proposed as influenced by six interrelated purposes - moral, personal, professional, organisational, public and cultural. The paper will present a taxonomy to illustrate how discernment of values and purposes will give educational leaders better understandings of the pressures and tensions they experience in leading schools ethically. The taxonomy will be described and analysed as a value-based lens for decision making for educational leaders.

Introduction

Increasing demands by Australian governments and communities for accountability results and the transparent reporting of student and school performance have meant that schools, and their leaders, are being faced with increasing pressure to not only improve student learning, but also to be responsible for producing and influencing evidence of student achievement. Recent international literature has identified these pressures as causing leaders to make conscious adaptations to their leadership practices (Fullan, 2009; Rowe, 2000; Wiseman, 2005), with the consequences of such actions resulting in moral and ethical tensions and sometimes discord at a person and community level (Frick, 2009).

A study by one of the authors (Pettit, 2010) on how one educational jurisdiction in Australia made use of data from national testing of literacy and numeracy, particularly in relation to the role that school leadership plays in this process, informed the development of a model for moral decision making for this article. Part of the purpose of the study was to

examine the experience of school leaders making decisions using external testing data for the improvement of learning. The research reported on the differing perceptions of principals and classroom teachers about the nature, role and impact of leadership in this process, uncovering tensions operating within schools about: 1) the value and purpose of using student achievement data from external tests, 2) the practical implications of operationalising an effective analysis and response to such data, and 3) the contexts of accountability and public reporting in which such tests are conducted. The research also unearthed questions about the moral discernment of leaders about the competing contexts associated with decisions and their subsequent actions.

This and other research on educational leadership (Greer, Searby & Toma, 2015; Johnson & Kruse, 2010) produces questions about understanding the processes that form one's values position, and then the forces that either help or hinder operationalising moral beliefs into action: What are the contexts in which leaders operate that impact on their values position? What are the processes that inform a leader's capacity for discernment in decision making? Why are a person's values position not necessarily operationalised or translated into action based on those values? This article presents a framework to aid in an understanding of the moral discernment process of leaders dealing with such decisions, by employing a Values Taxonomy that can be used to inform one's values position as a precursor to, and essential part of, moral discernment for choices in an outcome of the decision-making process.

Leadership and Moral Action

Educational literature and academic research over the last 15 years have attempted to address the issues associated with leading educational change and school improvement along with the relative merits of large-scale reform and school-level change. Moreover, much has been written about the role of the school leader in adopting a moral stance to improving student achievement together with increasing calls for school and system accountability in measuring student performance.

Traditional models of school leadership have been questioned. New paradigms involving "broad directional vision" (Fullan, 2009, p. 109), "moral action" (Sergiovanni, 2005) and a leadership based on "moral praxis" (Frick, 2009) have highlighted the central role of leaders in producing improvements in student achievement. Increasing demands by governments and the community for accountability results and the transparent reporting of student and school performance measures have meant that schools, and particularly school leaders, are being faced with increasing pressure to make conscious adaptations to their practices (Fullan, 2009; Rowe, 2000), often resulting in "intrapersonal moral discord" (Frick, 2009, p. 50): dilemmas and tensions between school leaders and professionals about the 'why'

of introduced school initiatives. Further, the concept of moral purpose that is "socially just" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 3) has become a key element in re-forming school cultures and building capacity for change.

These authors reflect the increasing calls for school leaders to adopt a moral lens to operationalise appropriate responses in response to perceived need. As a result of these pressures, there is a tension for school leaders to be explicitly positioned at the nexus of leading change, improving learning and reporting performance. Inherent in this tension is the importance of school leaders seeing the need for improvement on the one hand, and then actually doing something about it. This relationship between the moral purpose of using achievement data to improve student outcomes, then operationalising a response within a context of accountability and reporting, implies the need to examine the role of leadership through the lens of moral agency as a key driver in understanding the actions of school leaders in giving purpose to student outcome data.

Developing A Values Taxonomy

The recognition that leaders in service organisations, such as schools, experience moral and ethical tensions when balancing the demands of competing stakeholders, in areas such as utilising student achievement data, has been reported in the *SOLR Project* by Duignan (2003), and Duignan and Burford (2003). That study found that leaders in contemporary organisations require frames of reference that can assist them to manage situations of uncertainty, ambiguity and seeming contradictions or paradox. The challenges facing leaders in both the *SOLR* and Pettit (2010) research are complex and multidimensional, with many of these challenges presenting themselves as tensions where value choices are often between right-right, as well as right-or-wrong alternatives (Kidder, 1995). Finding optimal resolutions to such tension demands mindsets and approaches based on understanding the competing value elements and purposes within decision making.

The capability of leaders to recognise, articulate and prioritise values in the leadership of organisations has been a consistent focus of writers and researchers on leadership over the past thirty years (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2002; Hodgkinson, 1996; Sergiovanni, 2005; Starratt, 2004; Willower 1981). The writings of these authors have, to varying degrees, focused on the construct of "moral purpose" and associated leadership processes described variously as "moral potency" (Hanna & Avolio, 2010), "moral agency" (Bandura, 2006) and "moral literacy" (Tuana, 2007). Essentially, all these leadership foci view the ultimate effectiveness of the leadership process and the outcomes of organisational goals as resting in the pursuit and fulfilment of the moral and ethical needs of all individuals involved in leadership processes.

However, the experiences and research by a number of scholars (Bezzina & Burford, 2010; Burford, 2014;

Burford & Pettit, 2011; Pettit, 2010, 2015) suggest the existence of multiple contexts that act in tandem to influence a leader's capacity for, and conduct of, moral discernment for decision making as a precursor to judgement and action. Drawing on the findings from recent research (Pettit, 2010), this article posits that moral decision making is influenced by moral discernment of the relevant issues and tensions, which are created within six interrelated contexts; sometimes complimentary and sometimes conflicting. These contexts have overlapping but differing origins in moral, personal, professional, organisational, public and cultural influences. In attempting to understand the influences on moral discernment a taxonomy was developed to describe and classify the six contexts, and to show how they interact with one another as a basis for not only moral decision-making but also moral literacy in general. These influences interact at differing levels and strengths on leaders who, through the process of moral discernment, create meaning and direction for decision making from the resolution of the demands of these purposes.

The development of a taxonomy, as the first part of a Model for Moral Decision Making, is designed to provide some measure of classification of the differing contexts that influence a leader's values position as a precursor to moral discernment. This process also aids in explaining the interaction between the contexts, and subsequent tensions that may exist in forming one's values position. The first part of the model - the development of a Values Taxonomy - is illustrated in Figure 1.
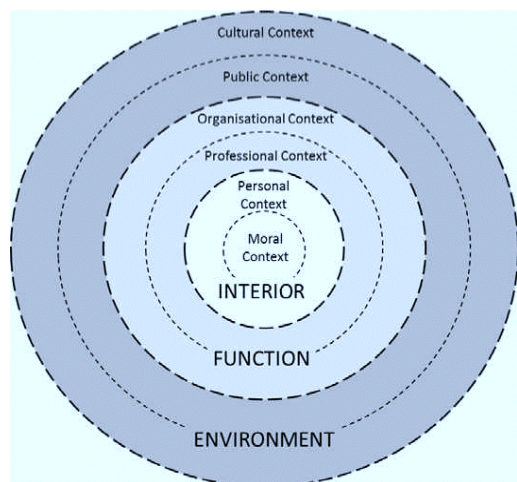
Figure 1. Values Taxonomy

Figure 1 shows the six contexts that impact on a leader's facility for moral discernment in three dimensions: Interior (comprising the Moral and Personal Contexts), Function (Professional and Organisational Contexts) and Environment (Public and Cultural Contexts). The dashed lines between the contexts indicate the fluid nature of the interaction between each, with no one component being mutually exclusive from the others. Each will be examined in turn to indicate its influence on moral

discernment as a basis for subsequent decision making and action.

Dimension 1: Interior

The first two contexts rest in the internal and deeply personal values, beliefs, character and needs of the individual involved in the leadership process. At the heart of this, the interior dimension, rests the moral context.

Moral Context

The first element in the taxonomy shows the dynamic living out of character, values, ethical beliefs and commitments. This is the basis for the moral context, and is aligned with "moral purpose". Centred on what we believe as our contribution to society, our responsibility for the lives of others and the commitment to act, our moral purpose is justified by moral reasoning about the right, true, good and praiseworthy. Tuana's (2007) model of moral literacy involving ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills and moral imagination, extends this notion and provides an ethical framework to effect moral agency, where we are "ethical agents" (p. 375) who are able to "assess what is held to be valuable in a context" (p. 374).

Applied to education, the importance of the Moral Context has become a key element in re-forming school cultures and building capacity for change. Sergiovanni (2005) also makes the link between the Moral Context and leadership as "the struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being" (p. 115). This is reinforced by Frick (2009) who, in referring to the work of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), makes the point that "moral considerations should be grounded in the prima facie principle: serve the best interests of the student. This principle is also affirmed as a moral "ideal [that] must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders" (Frick, 2009, p. 53). Importantly, Stefkovich and Begley (2007) support this assertion by identifying the overwhelming driver of moral action as a concern by leaders for the well-being of students. As such, the curriculum of the school, and the teaching and learning derived from it, should acknowledge the moral character of learning: an agenda of finding and choosing and fashioning ourselves as individuals and as a human community (Rose, 2009; Starratt, 2007). This challenge calls on each school to be clear and explicit about its moral purpose and the Moral Context in which it operates, and to build consensus around it.

However described, the Moral Context has been consistently identified as one of the fundamental necessities for bringing about the kind of change and improvement which will deliver desirable student learning in schools. In the particular context of schools, the commitment is ultimately to the transformation of the learner into a fuller, richer and more complete human being.

A pertinent Australian project focusing on school improvement, titled *Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools* (IDEAS), reminds us there is a need for shared sense of purpose to be grounded in a shared commitment to explicit values (Andrews, 2004). In other words, it is not sufficient to have a broad aspiration. There needs to be clarity and detail in the way the purpose is understood - and in particular about the values that underpin it. It has been demonstrated that clear and explicit dialogue about these values has a mutually reinforcing relationship with the emergence of a sense of shared leadership (Bezzina & Burford, 2010).

A fundamental question - the essence of the Moral Context - for educators is this: "What should I do if I am to make a genuine difference in the lives of my students?" It can be argued that educators do this when they infuse academic learning with a dimension of personal meaning, and thereby enrich the whole learning process (Starratt, 2004). This authentic learning is about giving of one's unique humanity to others and to the community. The facilitation of authentic learning is a fundamentally moral activity because it engages students in a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of their lives and in determining how they can best contribute to the greater good of the community and society (Hodgkinson, 1991). Learning which is not authentic to the needs of the student's life is not only inappropriate, but unethical. In other words, an educator who contributes to practices which are not authentic is engaging in behaviour which is morally wrong (Starratt, 2004). But one's beliefs are not sufficient to effectively engage purpose into action. A consideration of the deeply personal aspects affecting one's motivations and behaviours is needed to build the picture of moral discernment.

Personal Context

The second Interior element in the model refers to the reflective capacity of individuals to understand their reasons for acting, and how they place these actions in a values context. This is the essence of Personal Context. It considers the factors that operationalise one's beliefs into action, and seeks to explain how attitudes can affect behaviour and practices. It speaks to the constructs of values and beliefs that form self-concept and identity that guide moral consciousness, sensitivity and actions of individuals (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Branson, 2009; Burford & Pettit, 2011; Pettit, 2015; Tuana, 2007). Within the discussion around moving from purpose to action, the "living out of ethical beliefs and commitments" (Starratt, 2004, p.5) includes the factors that form a person's values, and then contribute to the significance one places on action arising from those beliefs.

An important element of Personal Context is moral potency, involving "not just ownership, but courage and a sense of efficacy [and] a disposition to act morally and translate it into moral action" (Bezzina & Tuana, 2012, p.11). This is a very powerful notion that links

Thompson's (2004) 'identity' with 'agency', or beliefs into action. Hannah and Avolio (2010) also discuss the idea of moral potency that involves "ownership over the moral aspects of one's environment, reinforced by efficacy beliefs in the capabilities to act to achieve a moral purpose and the courage to perform and persevere through challenges" (p. 293). Thus, moral potency in their eyes involves the ability to move from moral purpose to moral action, and is a function of the interplay between ownership, efficacy and courage.

The Personal Context, then, involves the leader not only having a belief in a moral purpose, but also a firm commitment to actualising this with the desire and belief in their power and ability (potency) to do so; that is, a "sense of their own capacity to make a difference in pursuing this purpose, and ultimately act courageously in its pursuit" (Bezzina & Tuana, 2012, p.13). It is here where values and beliefs about who we are and what we believe about leadership and student learning are seen to form the building blocks for action.

The Interior dimension described in the Model, encompassing both the Moral and Personal Contexts, is congruent with the approaches of Branson (2009) and Duignan (2007). Moral consciousness involves not only addressing a moral issue cognitively but also owning the outcome by acting self-reflectively rather than reacting to a situation. This is achieved through reflecting on the uniqueness of the self, incorporating self-esteem, motives, values, beliefs, and behaviours of the leader (Branson, 2009). Through this reflective interrogation of self, leaders rise above self-interest to act morally, or at least have a better understanding why they have not. Morally-focused, authentic leadership "is centrally concerned with ethics and morality and with deciding what is significant, what is right and what is worthwhile" (Duignan, 2007, p. 34).

From these, the issues of self-image, self-esteem, beliefs, motivations and principles are contained in the Moral and Personal Contexts influencing one's sense of self, and their highly intrinsic beliefs and values as a human being. This Interior dimension of the model forms the core for examining the issues and tensions involved in a leader's commitment to moral discernment as a key element in making morally-justifiable decisions.

Dimension 2: Function

The next surrounding layer of contexts in the Values Taxonomy encompasses the leader's approach to their role in the organisation (Professional Context), as well as the organisational dimensions themselves that define it as an entity (Organisational Context). These contribute towards, and describe, the function of both the leader and the organisation.

Professional Context

The Professional Context includes the norms and codes of conduct relating to the profession itself. Individuals in

professions operate within a code of behaviour for the performance of their role. Here, core values and beliefs about the significance of the contribution of the profession to society are bound by professional ethics or standards; and it is these values and beliefs that define what is the 'right thing to do' within that profession (Frick & Covaleskie, 2014).

The Professional Context, then, involves a person's understanding of their role, its core function, role clarity and boundaries. However, the concept also involves a leader's understanding of their function in the organisation and how they can influence change. Here, the leader's perception of their role as leader (not manager) can impact on subsequent actions.

In education, the Professional Context is expressed in constructs such as pedagogy, authentic learning, staff relations, confidentiality and privacy of stakeholders, collegiality and role performance. The recent *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* promulgated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has defined "excellence in school leadership" as consisting of three leadership requirements: 1) vision and values; 2) knowledge and understanding; and 3) personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills, in tandem with five professional practices: 1) leading teaching and learning; 2) developing self and others; 3) leading improvement, innovation and change; 4) leading the management of the school; and 5) engaging and working with the community as combining to form the leadership requirements and professional practices for school leaders (AITSL, 2011). These requirements and practices define the professional standards that are used to judge performance in the role.

The consideration of the Professional Context in the taxonomy, then, implies that a person's perception of their role (as distinct from their individual beliefs and values - embodied in the Moral Context - or sense of self-efficacy and moral potency embodied in Personal Context) can impact on an understanding of their role as leader in the organisation. Bounded by codes and ethics of behaviour, and a sense of professional conduct as a member of a profession, the Professional Context can be viewed as an element affecting a leader's ability to make decisions based on moral discernment, and provides another link in understanding the factors that move us from purpose to action.

Organisational Context

The fourth element in the Values Taxonomy - Organisational Context - continues this 'functional' approach to discernment, and involves the core business and mission of organisations that influence their view of the world, their place in it, and their ultimate purpose. This encompasses what an organisation values and celebrates, and how this influences the way leadership, management, resourcing and relationships are conducted, both within the entity itself and with external bodies.

The Organisational Context considers the practical, multi-dimensional factors that operationalise one's beliefs into action, and seeks to explain how attitudes and practices of its members affect current behaviour of the system itself (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In education, research has demonstrated that the school context on its own is not enough to drive effective or sustainable change (Fullan, 2005; Harris, 2005). Other studies have pointed to the perception of inclusivity (Hargreaves, 2004) as a key driver in determining a leader's willingness to operationalise attitudes; where outcomes and purposes are expressed more in human and personal terms than those related to managerial efficiency and operation.

The Organisational Context can be reinforced by considering factors such as the degree to which staff are encouraged and supported, in practical ways, to be involved in decision making. Importantly, this approach can influence both the purpose and level of action that gives commitment and enactment to moral purpose. These work-related factors, then, reflect the Organisational Context of the system, and the value placed on operationalising beliefs into action. Within the framework of the Values Taxonomy, Organisational Context provides another element influencing the leader's moral discernment about the 'right thing to do' in moving from purpose to action.

Together, the Professional and Organisational Contexts - elements of the Function dimension of the model - describe the interplay between the leader's attitude, perceptions and approach to their role as leader, in concert with organisational dimensions that frame the system's operation, purpose and function. In conjunction with the Interior dimension relating to the leader as a human being (embodied in the Moral and Personal Contexts), the stage is now set to consider a third dimension encompassing the wider societal and cultural setting that affects the leader's capacity for moral discernment - the Environment.

Dimension 3: Environment

The final group of contexts in the taxonomy is grouped around the external factors – the Environment dimension - that impact on a leader's value position for moral discernment and decision-making. While not having direct control over these, the leader must operate within these wider societal and cultural influences that are often related to tensions surrounding accountability and compliance; and these can often be at odds with the forgoing Interior and Function dimensions of the Model.

Public Content

Every school organisation exists within an external jurisdictional setting and set of accountability frameworks that can impact on decision-making processes within the organisation. Government and system requirements, particularly when tied to funding, can influence the exercise of leadership, as can the work of pressure groups and the nature of public discourse.

The fifth element in the Taxonomy - Public Context - involves these external environments that have the ability to influence the potency of leaders to translate beliefs into action. This resonates with Bandura's (2006) 'moral conduct' and 'moral actions' where both "moral knowledge" (p.101) and "social influences" (p.102) play a large part in determining how, and how effectively, personal beliefs are operationalised into community action.

As a result of these pressures, and public discourse on accountability for student learning, school leaders are required to be explicitly positioned at the nexus of leading change, improving learning and reporting performance. At the centre of this, for example, leaders are expected to see and understand the need to use information on student achievement and to diagnose learning and report performance. Research suggests that this has created a tension between being accountable for the measurement and reporting of student performance on the one hand (Rowe, 2000), and the moral obligation to use information on student achievement to effect improvement in student outcomes on the other (Hattie, 2005). With an increasing array of data available on students from external testing and classroom-based assessment, the analysis and reporting of student and school performance has produced new challenges for teachers, school leaders and school systems in a results-driven environment. This has been highlighted by Australian Government legislation embodied in the *Schools Assistant Act* (2004) and subsequent legislation, including the *Australian Education Act* (2013, 2017), establishing criteria for public funding of schools and requirements for accountability, transparency and public reporting of student performance.

The impact of the Public Context on moral discernment cannot be overstated as a key influence on a leader's capacity for moral decision making. Importantly in this analysis, then, it is the public arena that accountability for decisions can have a large influence on the leader's willingness and ability to move from moral purpose to moral action (see Abowitz, 2013).

Cultural Context

The final element in the Values Taxonomy - Cultural Context - involves an understanding that every organisation serves a role and purpose within particular societal and cultural milieus; and these in turn influence the way the organisation itself operates. There is also a strong reciprocal relationship between the perceptions of the community and those of the individuals within it. This is the external environment that influences a leader's facility for moral discernment. Hannah and Avolio (2010) put it this way: "Group and individual character are thus likely reciprocally related, with each influencing the other across levels through mechanisms such as organizational climate and culture as individuals interact and promote higher levels of moral potency in one another" (p.10).

The Cultural Context of an organization (including schools) can reflect the wider norms and behaviours inherent in the society in which it operates, as well as the purpose for which it was initially established. Not-for-profit organisations, such as those affiliated with a particular religious tradition, or established for social welfare reasons, have a very different cultural purpose to those established as a profit-making concern, from the small family business to the global multi-national corporation. In this sense, the organization itself will be framed by its reason for existence, its institutional environment, as well as be able to exert some measure of influence (to varying degrees) over the local, national, or global society in which it operates (see Wheatley, 2012). Together with the Public Context embodied in measures of accountability, compliance and codes of behaviour that determine how an organization operates in society, the Cultural Context forms an important element in the Environment dimension of the Values Taxonomy that brings into play the external influences on the organisation's behaviour, and hence, the ability of the leader to be conscious of the discernment process influencing the morality of their decisions. In this sense, the public (and political) context in which achievement tests are situated can be seen to affect school leaders' responses to the results and their subsequent analysis and interpretation, despite the view that data on student achievement has value. Further, the 'high stakes' nature of reporting student outcomes in the public context in which schools operate can often shape the leader's attitudes about, and response to, such outcomes in relation to the perceived value of the school itself.

Ultimately, the Cultural Context of organisations such as schools, coupled with community expectations surrounding the purpose of schooling, the use of data on student achievement, and equating performance results with "value for money" constructs, underscore the societal influences on the cultural purpose of schooling, and the leader's capacity for moral discernment in making decisions within this context.

Completing the Model

The six contexts contained in the Values Taxonomy - Moral, Personal, Professional, Organisational, Public and Cultural Context - can be seen to form a framework to understand the factors influencing leaders' moral discernment as a prelude for decision making and subsequent action. An appreciation of the interconnectedness of these constructs can assist leaders to understand the circumstances in which decisions are made, the competing influences on these decisions, and the importance of such discernment in providing a framework for judgement and subsequent action. Dotger and Theoharis (2008) discuss the move from discernment to action by referring to Rest's (1999) 'Four Component Model' in explaining the role of moral/ethical dispositions in decision making. In moving from 'Moral Sensitivity' in interpreting a particular situation, through 'Moral

Judgment', or the ability to judge actions as morally right or wrong, and 'Moral Motivation' where moral values are prioritised, to 'Moral Character', they explain the process of discernment: "If an individual recognizes the various factors of an ethical situation (sensitivity), makes a sound ethical decision (judgment), and places moral values over one's personal values (motivation), then that individual is prepared to execute a moral action" (Dotger & Theoharis, 2008, p.3). In exploring this link between beliefs and action, other writers speak of the "gap between moral purpose and moral performance" (Thompson, 2004, p. 27), "ethical blindness" (Bezzina, 2011, p.3) and "realized moral purpose" (Fullan, 2010, p.15). In congruence with Starratt's spiralling framework of moral responsibility (in Doscher & Nomore, 2008), leadership is often seen to be more than observed behaviours and measured outcomes; it begins with the core of the leader as a human being.

However, Bezzina and Tuana (2012) add a note of concern with leaders having to "translate these moral and ethical concerns and purposes into action" (p. 4). The authors caution:

> Individuals will only choose a particular moral action if they are both convinced of its importance and have a sense that they are capable of acting in this way. Before they will act in a way that aligns consistently with moral purpose (moral agency) they need a sense of their own role as an influential player in this domain (moral potency) reflected in their sense of a capacity to act in ways that make a difference; their ownership of, and commitment to moral purpose; a sense of hope; and the requisite courage to act. (p. 6)

The three dimensions of the Values Taxonomy (Interior, Function and Environment) provide the necessary building blocks for completing the Model for Moral Decision Making by including the next important step, Moral Agency. Bandura (2002) is explicit about the nexus between one's values and action by making the strong statement that "a complete theory of moral agency must link moral knowledge and reasoning to moral conduct" (p.101). That is, it is not sufficient for the leader (or anyone) to know what is right; it is a requirement for them to act on their beliefs to effect positive change.

Further, the importance of moral purpose (Fullan, 2005) that is socially just (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000) has become a key element in re-forming school cultures and building capacity for change. Levin and Fullan (2008) support this approach, and specifically appeal to educators' sense of moral purpose and their belief that education is about success for all students" (p. 294).

Using this approach related to the Model for Moral Decision Making, the components of 'Values Position' and 'Moral Discernment' are seen as important elements in producing a Moral Outcome, or moving from beliefs into action. This relationship is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Model for Moral Decision Making
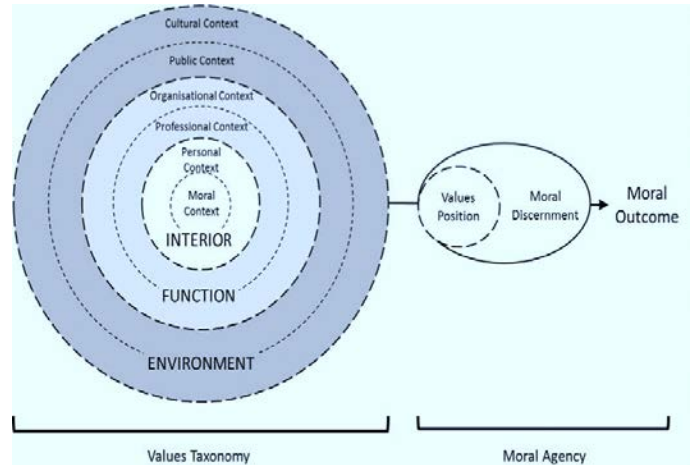
Using Figure 2, the two main components of the Moral Decision Making Model – Values Taxonomy and Moral Agency - link the important processes involved in defining one's values, and then acting on them to produce an outcome. Inherent in this is the significance of forming (and informing) a values position using the taxonomy as a precursor to, and component of, moral discernment when deciding on a particular outcome, which may involve some action or the decision to not act at all.

Within the wider context of evidence-based leadership, the Model for Moral Decision Making developed here also suggests a context for understanding the importance of moral potency as a key driver in translating beliefs into action. This approach suggests that even though a leader may be 'morally literate' with a sensitivity that tunes and gives direction to their moral compass, a particular moral action will only be chosen if they feel they are capable of effecting change and have the capacity to act (Bezzina & Tuana, 2012).

Moral potency becomes an influential element in determining how moral and ethical concerns, as discerned by using the Values Taxonomy, become translated into action. In this, moving from purpose to action produces observable behaviours that are context-bound. A consideration of moral potency, as a link between the Personal, Function and Environment contexts of the Values Taxonomy, and involving the interplay between purpose, action and context, can help to explain why leaders may not necessarily translate beliefs into action, despite knowing that it is in the best interests of students to do so (Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2013).

Importantly, recognising the impact of moral potency involves leadership practices that give an explicit, articulated and practical priority for ethical decision making based on choices that promote positive outcomes for those they lead. As suggested, the Model can provide important insights into the sources of potential misunderstandings, tensions and inevitable conflict that leaders experience inherent in moral decision-making

processes. The Model's application will be especially important for leaders at any level to help identify tensions about purpose and competing values so as to make decisions based on a discernment of the morality of their actions and related outcomes. The final decision to act will still rest with the individual's capacity and motivation to act on the outcome of this core discernment process.

Conclusion

The Model for Moral Decision Making presented in this article has the potential to assist leaders to be conscious of the (often competing and tension-causing) factors that affect their decisions; in making judgments about the worth of particular behaviours in influencing decision making (Fullan, 1991; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Harris, 2005; Romero, 1998) that lead to moral action.

Within the wider context of evidence-based leadership, the Model for Moral Decision Making also suggests a framework for understanding the approach taken by leaders in giving purpose to any improvement process beyond the school context and student outcomes into organisations not necessarily connected directly with education. This paper also suggests that the model can provide important insights into the many often-competing contexts that leaders experience inherent in moral decision-making processes across different cultures. These contexts involving inner beliefs, the functional view of a person's role within an organisation, and indeed the multidimensional aspects of the organisation itself, as well as the wider socio-cultural influences affecting one's values position, can have a large impact on forming, and informing, the process of moral discernment and subsequent action (or inaction), pointing to the need for leaders to have the capacity for greater awareness of the discernment process influencing the morality of their decisions.

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