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## **INSIDE OUT: The Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Decision Making**

**Julia Geisman**

**[julia.geisman@millenniumlearning.com](mailto:julia.geisman@millenniumlearning.com)**

### Introduction

With increased competitive and economic pressures, organizations are faced with challenges that force them to make decisions that have far-reaching impacts. These impacts affect the way in which organizations conduct their business activities, protect the well-being of their employees, interact with their customers, and contribute to their communities and to the society at large. Therefore, it is critical that decision-makers have the skills to solve ethically complex business problems.

What do these skills look like? Is it simply the ability to work through a decision-making model? Is it living by the corporate “code of ethics” that delineates correct versus incorrect behavior? Perhaps, the larger question lies in the appropriateness of relegating ethical decision making to an external solution when ethics reflect an individual’s values, beliefs, and moral judgment combined with their cognitive and emotional maturity.

This paper explores the relationship between self-awareness and ethical decision making. It delves into the correlation between self-awareness and ethical decision making using emotional intelligence as the model for developing self-awareness and moral reasoning as the measure of ethical behavior. It also examines gender differences as they pertain to emotional intelligence and moral reasoning. organization, and the greater community.

### The Genesis of the Paper

This study evolved from my curiosity regarding the relationship between self-awareness and its influence on decision making. My supposition is that no decision is ever made without a self-serving motive. This view is supported by Johannessen (1997) who postulates that those things which are viewed as positive by humans are those things that enhance their well-being. Conversely, those things that detract from one’s well-being are negative. The basis of one’s value system is fulfilling one’s needs and the desire to achieve a sense of well-being. He states: “values are expressed by means of each individual’s moral codes” (p. 983).

The degree of self-interest is tempered, I believe, by the degree of a person’s self-

awareness of his/her own needs, the needs of others, environmental influences, and the consequences of the decision. If a person is self-absorbed (narcissistic at the extreme), the decision is more likely to be focused on satisfying his/her needs regardless of its impact on others or the environment.

On the other hand, a person with heightened self-awareness has an increased understanding of self in relationship to him/herself, to others, and to the environment. Consequently, the end result of decisions made by those with high self-awareness is likely to be more systemic in addressing the broader needs of more people. Another way of looking at this relationship is in the context of moral awareness. Butterfield (1997) suggests that “moral awareness occurs when a person realizes that his/her response to a given issue could affect the interests, welfare, or expectations of the self or others in a fashion that may conflict with one or more ethical principles or norms” (p.iii). The way in which one responds to the rules, mores, ethics, or laws is a direct reflection of one’s moral development. This will be discussed in detail later in the paper.

And so began, my journey into exploring the correlation between self-awareness (via emotional intelligence) and ethical decision making.

### Purpose of the This Discussion

Ethics has been hotly debated through the ages. However, the blatant breach of ethical behavior recently by business executives and politicians has brought ethics under scrutiny once again. It begs the question of defining ethical behavior and its appropriate boundaries. Can ethics be successfully embedded within a corporate environment such that the environment supports and demands ethical behavior on all levels? Would the CEOs of WorldCom or Tyco have jeopardized the well-being of their staff, shareholders, and community if they had heightened self or moral awareness? I think not.

Defining ethical decision making is a complex process. It can be safely stated that there is no absolute definition or methodology for ethical decision making although various theorists would argue otherwise. The purpose of this discussion is to explore the correlation of emotional intelligence (EI) and ethical decision making. Another way to state this is to evaluate the relationship between the intellectual and emotional self (Griseri, 2002) as it pertains to ethical decision making.

### Background

The intention of this section is to provide a high-level view of the three key components of this study: ethical decision making, emotional intelligence (EI), and the impact of gender on both ethical decision making and EI, if any. One way to define ethical decision making, in my opinion, is that it is the external expression of one’s moral development and reasoning skills, values, assumptions, and beliefs. Since moral development and

reasoning skills are the underpinning of ethical decision making, they will be specifically addressed later in the paper.

It is difficult to argue the importance of ethical decision making and the role it plays in our daily lives. For the purposes of this discussion, ethical decision making will be confined to the corporate setting. There are multiple perspectives regarding the issue of separation of “professional” and “personal” ethical behavior that makes it an interesting research topic. Does a person’s moral reasoning, values, or beliefs change or do environmental influences require different ethical behavior? As Loe, Ferrell, and Mansfield (2000) suggest, there is general agreement among researchers that ethical decision making is a construct of individual variables (cognitive and affective abilities), social and organizational influences (e.g., culture, financial performance of the company), as well as role responsibilities (p. 185).

Loe et al. conducted an extensive review of the empirical studies that have assessed ethical decision making within a business setting and grouped them into four major categories with various subsets. Their findings underscore the complexity of ethical decision making in general and, specifically, in the workplace as well as the myriad of perspectives from which it is considered. It is interesting to note that they did not include any research examining the correlation of EI and ethical decision making.

The literature review for ethical decision making in this paper focuses on the theories and research findings of: Jones (1991), Trevino (1992), Holian (2002), Lii (2001), Johannessen (1997), and Van der Burg (2003).

The influence our emotions have on our worldview and the way in which we interact with our surroundings is a topic that has been researched for centuries and continues to be a source of fascination. However, considering the affective as an expression of intelligence is a relatively new area of research emerging in the late 1800s into the early twentieth century. The importance of this aspect of our humanity is further underscored by the findings from neuroscience that has scientifically demonstrated the influence the limbic system has on our emotional state, and thus the way in which we perceive the world around us.

Prior to the work of Mayer and Salovey, the affective factor was somewhat amorphous – an aspect of human interaction that was recognized as having impact but relegated to the softer side of science (e.g., social science and psychology). Mayer and Salovey (1990), in their seminal work, operationalized the constructs of the affective as abilities and capable of being tested much like the traditional IQ (Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). The notion of the emotional self as a crucial success component has gained momentum since the mid-1990s. The way in which one perceives, interprets, manages, and uses emotions in oneself and others is an area that is the most subtle and

unpredictable, in my opinion, and therefore, one that must not be ignored when considering the ethical decision making phenomenon.

No research in human dynamics is complete without considering the impact of gender differences that, I believe, add richness and depth to social science research. It is generally accepted that men and women have distinct ways in which they perceive, interpret, and interact with themselves, others, and the environment. Those differences, for example, extend into the way they approach ethical issues as demonstrated by the work of Gilligan (1982;1995) when she challenged the cognitive moral development model developed by Kohlberg (1969). It is interesting to note that very limited research has explored gender differences in relationship to EI. Numerous studies have been conducted in fulfillment of doctorate requirements (Sutarso, 1998, Alloway, 2004, Hopkins, 2004, Rivera Cruz, 2004) all of which indicate varying degrees of gender differences in either emotional intelligence or ethical decision making. It is notable that even though each of these studies did not use a consistent EI model (e.g., Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, Goleman, or Bar-On), the trend was consistent throughout their findings.

I found only one research study (Scott, 2004) that specifically explored the relationship between EI and ethical decision making. Her findings were consistent with the other studies.

### Hypothesis

My hypothesis is simple: that training in EI combined with a three-month weekly coaching process will increase middle managers' ability to resolve complex ethical business problems that successfully address the issue, the interests of the individuals involved, the organization, the customers, and the greater community. As a result, I suggest an organization gains customer and employee loyalty, avoids costly litigation, and maintains a positive image in the market place, just to name a few of the advantages of a corporate culture that requires ethical behavior.

### Exploratory Questions

The hypothesis produced three questions which this paper explores: (1) Is there a correlation between EI and ethical decision making?; (2) Can EI be increased as a result of a corporate training and coaching intervention?; and (3) Are there gender differences as they pertain to the relationship between EI and ethical decision-making?

The environmental, social influences, organizational culture, and reward system are important to factor into the cause of ethical or unethical behavior. For the purposes of this discussion, they are considered contingent variables since they are unpredictable.

For example, when a company or individual feels threatened, ethical norms may be compromised. Trevino (1992) cites the studies conducted by Harshorne and May (1928) as evidence that immoral behavior can occur in people with high moral character.

## The Literature Review

### Moral Development and Reasoning

A discussion of ethical decision making would be incomplete without first examining moral development and reasoning as its basis. Starting with the basics of morals, Johannessen (1997) provides a definition that is particularly applicable to this study: “the thought and action strategies developed on the basis of a person’s value system, generating a set of action rules as to what is right and what is wrong behavior” (p. 983). Johannessen’s description creates the context for the rest of this discussion.

The study of moral development began with Piaget’s 1932 seminal research of the moral development in children. He theorized that morality was a combination of both cognitive and developmental elements (Trevino, 1992). Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), building on Piaget’s early research, coined the phrase “cognitive moral development” (CMD) and endeavored to measure moral development (Fraedrich, Thorne and Ferrell, 1994). He studied 58 American males over 20 years and developed a three-level moral development model.

Kohlberg (1969) defines these levels of cognitive moral development as follows: level one ( $L_1$ ) as pre-conventional, level two ( $L_2$ ) as conventional, and level three ( $L_3$ ) as post-conventional. Each level consists of two stages, the second of which reflects increased maturity (see Fig. 1). The view of one’s relationship to society, its mores and expectations defines moral maturity according to Kohlberg (Trevino, 1992). His explanations of moral development and principled moral reasoning were based on justifications of criteria previously set forth by moral philosophers such as Kant, Hare, Frankena, Brandt, Rawls, and Raphael (Trevino, 1992, p. 447).

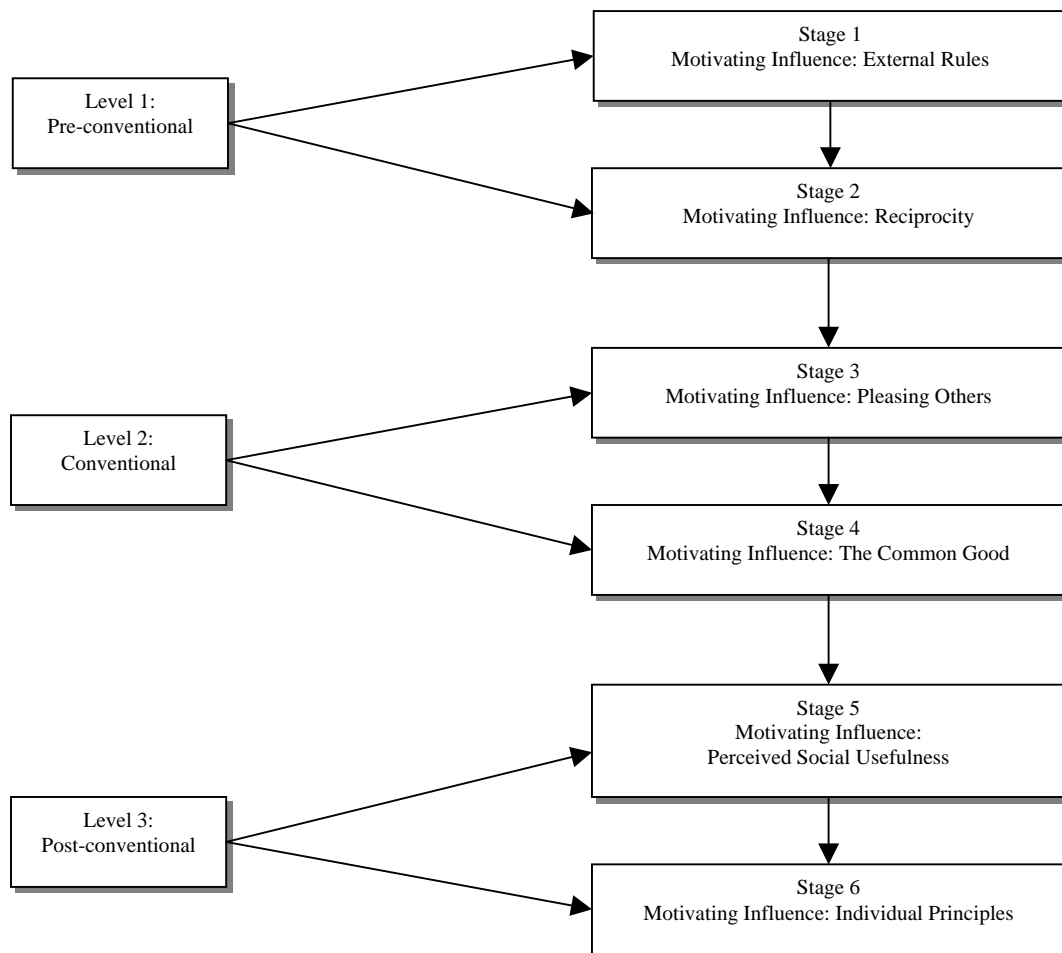
During Level One (pre-conventional), stage one ( $L_1S_1$ ), a person’s moral decision making is guided by the imposition of external rules. Obedience is based on a system of reward and punishment. Stage two ( $L_1S_2$ ) adds reciprocity to the definition of fairness. Trevino (1992) describes fairness as: “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” (p.446).

Level Two (conventional) occurs when the individual has internalized the external rules and shared societal norms. Stage three ( $L_2S_3$ ) defines right behavior as “what pleases or helps others and what is approved by them. Motives and intentions also become important at this stage” (Trevino, 1992, p. 446). Embedded in the individual’s decision-

making process is interpersonal trust and social approval. In stage four (L<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub>), the individual perspective is broadened to “consider the rules and laws of social, legal, or religious systems that are designed to promote the common good” (Trevino, p. 446).

In Level Three (post-conventional), the individual factors in his/her own values along with others’ expectations, rules and laws. Specifically, during stage five (L<sub>3</sub>S<sub>5</sub>), Trevino (1992) states that individuals begin considering changing the laws based on their relevance to societal purposes (p. 447). Trevino notes that Kohlberg argued that stage five judgments are more differentiated and thus more cognitively complex. Further, he suggests these decisions are more inclusive because they include the lower level judgements as well (p. 447). According to Kohlberg, stage six (L<sub>3</sub>S<sub>6</sub>) is the pinnacle of principled moral thinking and one that few individuals reach. When faced with a conflict between law and one’s principles, one will act in accordance with one’s principles. However, he later stated that stage six was not supported by longitudinal research.

**Fig. 1: Kohlberg’s Cognitive Moral Development Model<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup>Trevino, L. K. (1992). Moral reasoning and business ethics: Implications for research, education, and management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(5/6), 445-459.

Carol Gilligan (1982), a leading researcher in gender studies, challenged Kohlberg's research due to his use of all-male subjects, suggesting the research was tainted by gender bias. She theorizes that there are two types of ethics associated with moral reasoning: the ethics of care and the ethics of justice. While Kohlberg's CMD theory emphasizes rights and justice principles, she argues that ethics of caring is an important part of moral reasoning. Gilligan (1982) states: "Moral problems are problems of human relations" (p. xix). Gilligan based her initial research on the findings of Haan (1975) and Holstein's (1976) longitudinal studies, both of which found that women's moral judgment is different from men's. Women's judgments tend to be more closely tied to feelings of empathy and compassion. They also seem to be more concerned with the resolution of real as opposed to hypothetical dilemmas to which men seem to give priority (p. 69). Gilligan summarizes the differences between the genders in the following statement:

*The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction of care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the "real and recognizable trouble" of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference with the rights to life and self-fulfillment (p.100).*

Lastly, there is a school of thought about the neurological basis of morality. According to Gazzaniga (2005), humans are the only species that form beliefs, deepens them, and will adhere to them even when these beliefs are challenged or proven wrong (p. 161). He posits there is an innate moral sense or instinct everyone possesses. He uses the research of James Wilson (1993) who refutes the notion that moral development is based solely on external constructs. Wilson poses the question regarding the source of the motivation or willingness to conform to rules and laws. Gazzaniga notes that neuroscientists have now proven the emotional part of the brain becomes active when a person decides to act on a moral problem. Conversely, this part of the brain remains inactive, if the person chooses not to act. Gazzaniga sums up the neuroscientific view when he states:

*It is as if all the social data of the moment, the personal survival interests we each possess, the cultural experience we have undergone, and the basic temperament of our species all feed into the subconscious mechanism we all possess and out comes a response, an urging for either action or inaction (p. 171).*

All these views are valid and have informed the direction of this discussion. They each offer another perspective that has been considered as part of this study.

### Ethical Decision Making

Underlying my hypothesis is the notion that if one has greater self-awareness versus self-focus, any decision (ethical or otherwise) will be broader based and perhaps more systemic. Within this context, I am defining self-awareness as "self" in relationship: to oneself, to others, to society, and to the environment. Therefore, a person with greater self-awareness is prone to make decisions that satisfy his/her own needs and desires in balance with those of others who are affected either directly or indirectly by the decision.

Conversely, a person who is self-focused may be committed to satisfying his/her needs and desires despite potential negative consequences on others. There are numerous examples of corporate leaders in today's business environment who have deceived themselves into thinking their decisions actually fulfill others' needs. Their conviction was so strong they were able to convince others to agree. Therefore, the decisions they made were tipped in their favor. One might apply this view to the Enron situation where Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling could contend they were simply fulfilling their responsibility to increase shareholder value.

Ethical decision making is complex and subject to a variety of influences including personal moral development and reasoning, values, and assumptions (internal factors) as well as external pressures. What constitutes an ethical decision for one person may be considered otherwise by another. As Fraedrich, Thorne, and Ferrell (1994) state: "There have been many ways that scholars have attempted to describe, analyze and predict the moral reasoning process of individuals" (p.829). For the purposes of this paper, moral reasoning and ethical decision making are being used interchangeably.

Although there is an undisputable interdependency between moral development and ethical decision making, researchers continue to define this relationship and to create models that explain, describe, support, and measure ethical behavior. According to Holian (2002), many managers learn how to resolve ethical dilemmas through trial and error (p. 862). She posits cognitive and affective (emotional) skills, or lack thereof, contribute to managers' ability to cope with stress associated with their roles. Lii (2001) adds another dimension to Holian's proposition by suggesting that cognitive dissonance occurs when managers are faced with conflicts between their values and organizational goals. Both Holian and Lii's research inform the degree to which this exists.



Drawing upon previous research (Stark 1992; McDonald and Zepp, 1991), Holian defines ethical issues “as those which relate to the grey areas between what is accepted as right and wrong” (p. 863). Her findings identified four key categories: (1) judgment, (2) integrity, (3) courage, and (4) humanity (p. 865). Holian defines judgment as having the ability to identify the amount of information regarding people and context required for making a decision; integrity as being aware of one’s values and acting in accordance with them; courage as being willing to accept the consequences of a choice made under uncertainty; and humanity as a holistic category that differentiates good from bad decisions. It is this last category that addresses authenticity, understanding, forgiveness, humor, vulnerability, and open and honest communication (p. 865).

The participants in Holian’s study defined the process of ethical decision making as a combination of intuitive elements coupled with a conscious or cognitive process (p. 865). As a result of her study, Holian identified four modes of decision making that reflects a distinction between issues requiring cognitive skills and those requiring the affective (emotional) skills. The cognitive component is based on information, rules and regulations, and addresses the tangible or black and white issues that she identifies as the legalist mode (p. 865). The modes that address the areas she identifies as being grey, I believe, reflect an emphasis on affective skills. They are: “(1) assessment of consequences on self (entrepreneurial mode); (2) consideration of impact on others (navigation mode); or (3) confusion and fear (worried mode)” (p. 865).

Johannessen (1997) takes a systemic view of morality and ethics. While his suppositions still need to be empirically demonstrated, he offers an interesting perspective regarding moral action. He suggests that thoughts and actions are determined by the social system in which a person lives and form the basis of the rules defining what is right and wrong action (p. 983). He considers these action strategies to be a “system of relations” (p. 983). Ethics, as he defines them, are moral codes that have been socially constructed and arranged in an acceptable hierarchy (p. 984). On the surface, I suspect, many researchers would find this to be a reasonable definition of ethical behavior.

However, Johannessen makes an interesting and what seems to be a unique assertion regarding the impetus behind a person’s actions. According to Johannessen, those things that are considered as positive in our lives are those things that contribute to our well-being. Conversely, those things that reduce or impede our well-being are considered negative (p. 983) While his statement may portray people as self-serving, he adds another dimension to the concept of needs by suggesting that all human beings have a need to feel active and useful. He states that a sense of usefulness occurs when we are being helpful to others (p. 985). He posits "human wellbeing is linked to the mutual fulfillment of personal and other biological, psychological and social needs/wishes" (p. 985). He also notes that while the biological and psychological values

are linked specifically to the individual, the social values are reflective of both the individual and the social system (p. 988). Perhaps he is suggesting that it is difficult to separate them from one another. This is yet another demonstration, in my opinion, of the systemic view Johannessen takes regarding ethics and decision making in general.

As Johannessen (1997) suggests, defining ethics as a balance between individual and group needs might lead one to believe he is suggesting that a sound ethical decision addresses the needs of as many people as possible. However, he defines the “moral balance” (p. 995) as that of fulfilling personal well-being while directly or indirectly addressing the needs and wishes of those who are least fulfilled within the social system (p. 995). In other words, Johannessen proposes that it is the consequences rather than the intention that define a morally (or ethically) sound action. He contends that it is this systemic balance that is the foundation for ethical decision making (p. 998).

Johannessen designed a conceptual five-step model to support this approach: (1) analyze one’s own abilities, (2) analyze the situation, (3) analyze possible consequences, (4) take action, and (5) learn from possible negative consequences of good intentions.

I have also included Van Der Burg’s (2003) view as part of this discussion because it adds another dimension to ethical decision making which I believe is important. He suggests that few ethical theorists have addressed the dynamic nature of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nor have they considered how this constant change affects ethics and morality, and ultimately ethical decision making. Further, he states: “In order to be able to meet the challenge of dynamics, we should emphasize in our thinking specific elements such as ideals and judgments on concrete cases rather than rules and principles” (p. 14). Van Der Burg stresses that, while it is difficult to achieve, it is important to keep our self-reflections and personal and group identities open to change (p. 14).

Jones (1991) proposes a model he calls issue-contingent. He theorizes that current ethical decision making models focus on the process with little regard for the ethical issue itself (p. 366). Although, Jones states explicitly that he attempts to connect issue-related components to ethical behavior without any empirical evidence, it is an interesting view of ethical decision making that bears consideration. Both he and Van Der Burg, in my opinion, place an emphasis on the importance of the situation or extenuating circumstances that influences the ethical resolution. However, Jones suggests the moral intensity of the situation is an important determinant of ethical behavior (p. 371).

Jones (1991) provides what I consider to be valuable definitions of an ethical (moral) issue and decision. He states that an ethical issue occurs when the action or decision has “consequences for others and must involve choice, or *volition*, on the part of the...decision maker” (p. 367). An ethical decision is defined as one “that is both legal

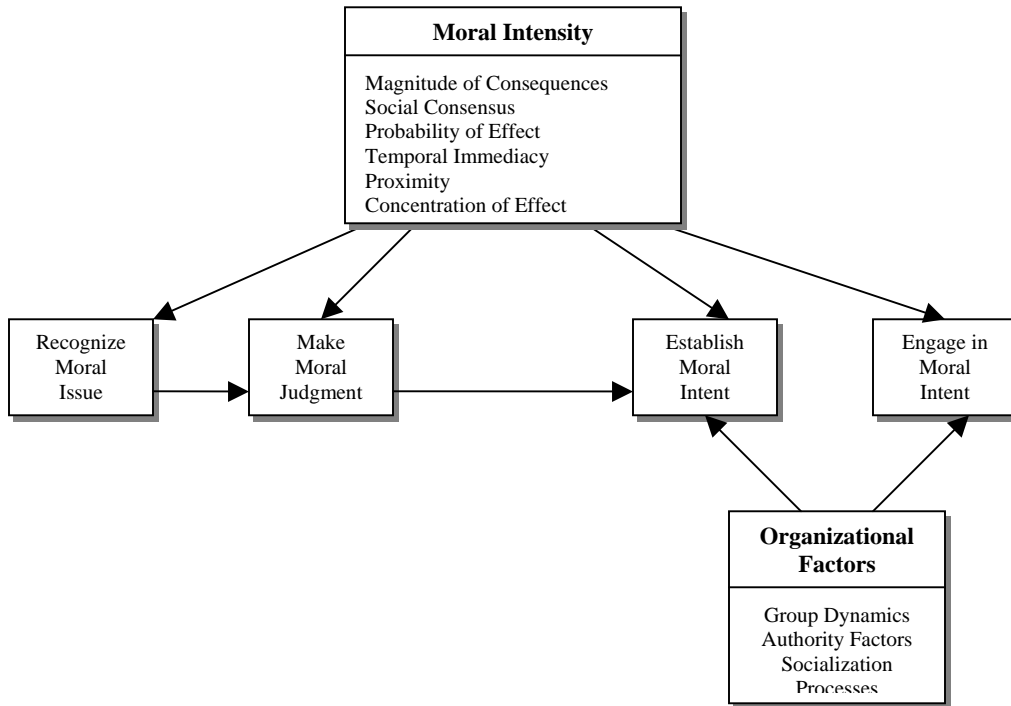
and morally acceptable to the larger community” (p. 367). The keystone of his argument is moral intensity that Jones describes as a multi-dimensional set of characteristics that define the “extent of issue-related moral imperative in a situation” (p. 372).

Jones (1991) argues that while the other theorists focus on the individual (moral development, values, knowledge, gender) or organizational consequences, moral intensity focuses on the issue itself which ultimately determines its resolution. He bases his argument on observations and previous research that demonstrate that (a) moral intensity is situation-based, (b) individuals are capable of determining moral intensity, and (c) these judgments, while subjective and potentially biased, are accurate enough to make critical distinctions (p. 373).

Jones (1991) has created a model consisting of six components: magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect (p. 376). Fig 2 provides a graphical representation of his model and definitions of each component.

The last concept to consider as an important factor is the relationship between the cognitive and the emotional elements when it comes to ethical decision making. Recognition of this interrelatedness is due to the emerging field of cognitive neuroscience. For example, Phelps (2006) notes “the neural circuitry of emotion have emphasized specific brain structures that appear to be primarily linked to emotional processes, yet interact extensively with other brain systems underlying cognitive function” (p. 28). Neuroscientists attribute this interaction to the function of the human amygdala.

**Fig. 2: Jones' Issue Contingent Model of Ethical Decision Making in Organizations<sup>1</sup>**



**Magnitude of consequences** – the sum of the harms (or benefits) done to victims (or beneficiaries) of the moral act in question.

**Social consensus** – the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good).

**Probability of effect** – a joint function of the probability that the act in question will actually take place and the act in question will actually cause the harm (benefit) predicted.

**Temporal immediacy** – the length of time between the present and the onset of consequences of the moral act in question (shorter length of time implies greater immediacy).

**Proximity** – the feeling or nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical) that the moral agent [decision maker] has for victims (beneficiaries) of the evil (beneficial) act in question.

**Concentration of effect** – an inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of *given magnitude*.

Jones, T. M. (1991) Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management: The Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), (p. 374-377, 379).

Based on these scientific advances, one could conclude that to consider ethical decision making solely as a cognitive function would be only partially correct. Gardner (2004), Mayer and Salovey (1999), Bar-On (2005), and Goleman (1995) have drawn heavily on this field to support their hypotheses.

## Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained prominence as a key element of success both professionally and personally. Like other scientific theories that have been operationalized and recognized as being credible, there are differing theories of EI being hotly debated and actively researched. This section compares and contrasts three views of EI. The theories examined were developed by: Peter Salovey and John Mayer; Reuven Bar-On; and Daniel Goleman. Salovey and Mayer were influenced by an interest in the relationship between cognitive abilities and emotion. Bar-On, was influenced by his interest in various aspects of performance. Goleman focused on competency models (p. 1).

Regardless of the model, they all agree the general category of EI represents a combination of both cognitive and emotional (non-cognitive) abilities (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003, p. 6). Additionally, there is an underlying congruency in its general description: the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions and feelings, the ability to make discernments about one's own and others' emotions and feelings, and the ability to use the information to influence one's own and others' thinking and actions.

A brief overview of EI's evolution provides a context for the current differentiation. EI has its roots in the 1920s through the work of E. L. Thorndike who challenged the widely accepted belief that intelligence was based exclusively on cognitive ability. He theorized that intelligence was more than just cognition; that it had an emotional component which he identified as social intelligence. He defined social intelligence as "the ability to perceive one's own and others' internal states, emotives, and behaviors, and to act toward them optimally on the basis of that information" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 187). Various researchers continued to explore the non-cognitive abilities during the 1930s and 1940s. It was Wechsler who, in the 1950s, proposed that these non-cognitive abilities contributed to a person's success in life (Cherniss 2000; Salovey & Mayer 1990; Bar-On 2005).

Howard Gardner (2004) defines the non-cognitive ability "as a biopsychological potential to process specific forms of information in certain kinds of ways" (p. 29). This led to his theory of multiple intelligences, one category of which is personal intelligences. He makes a distinction between interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, the former being the ability to "discriminate among persons" (p. 39) and to understand their motives, how to effectively work with them, and in some instances manipulate them (p. 39). Gardner describes intrapersonally intelligent people as those with the ability to identify one's own feelings, goals, fears, along with strengths and

weaknesses. It is interesting that he suggests this model of inward focus can be used to make judicious decisions in life (p. 39).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) were the first to operationalize the term emotional intelligence. They define it as: "...involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them" (p. 267). While this definition is similar in nature to their predecessors such as E. L. Thorndike's social intelligence and Howard Gardner's inter- and intrapersonal intelligences, it differs in that they introduce the notion that EI influences one's perceptions and actions. Their model includes interpersonal and intrapersonal components, without explicitly addressing them as separate and unique as theorized by Gardner.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) initially hypothesized that EI has validity as an element of the traditional concept of intelligence. If, in fact, it was going to be called intelligence it had to correlate with the traditional intelligence measurements by being ability-based (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003, p. 10). They used, as the basis of their hypothesis, Wechsler's (1958) definition of intelligence: "the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment" (p. 187). They also evoked the theories of Woodworth (1949) who suggested that IQ measurements should include a scale for demonstrating "*not* being afraid, angry, grieved, or inquisitive over things that arouse the emotions of younger children" (p.185). Additionally, Mayer and Salovey's early research cited Leeper's (1948) description of emotions as "processes which arouse, sustain, and direct activity" (p. 186) and coupled these hypotheses with modern theories that see emotions as adaptatively influencing or directing cognitive activities to further substantiate their hypothesis (p. 186). In my opinion, their definition reflects the characteristics of perception, thought, and action.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) revised their original four-branch model further refining the quantifiable dimensions. Each branch describes a unique ability: **Branch 1:** Appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others; **Branch 2:** Utilization of emotion to facilitate thinking; **Branch 3:** Understanding emotional meaning; and **Branch 4:** Regulation of emotions. They suggest this four-branch model is representative of an ability model which, I believe, appears to be consistent with measurable capabilities.

The ability to recognize emotions, Branch 1, is the building block for the other dimensions. Accurate perception and emotional expression are critical and fundamental to social communication. They extend this ability to recognizing emotion in objects, art, stories, music as well as other external stimuli (Chastukhina, 2003, p. 4).

When discussing Branch 2, Mayer (2006) asserts that it is the emotions that guide the cognitive system and stimulates the thought process. Chastukhina (2003) describes this branch as “the ability to generate, use, and feel emotion as necessary to communicate feelings or employ them in other cognitive processes” (p. 4).

Mayer (2006) states that each emotion has specific patterns of messages and actions leading to the ability to reason, which is the essence of Branch 3 and the core of EI. Chastukhina (2003) distills Mayer’s description down to “the ability to understand emotional information, to understand how emotions combine and progress through relationship transitions, and to appreciate such emotional meanings” (p. 4).

Branch 4, according to Mayer (2006), is the ability to block or remain open to emotional signals in oneself and others. One’s level of receptivity is determined by the degree to which the signal evokes pleasure or pain.

Reuven Bar-On’s (2005) definition of EI differs from that of Mayer and Salovey in that it is trait-based, and has a higher degree of overlap with traditional personality measurements (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003, p. 10). During his early research, Bar-On (2005) observed there was a recurring attempt to combine emotional and social components when trying to recognize, understand, and describe emotions (p. 2). He drew from Gardner’s work with intra- and interpersonal intelligences and Carolyn Saarni’s (1990) description of emotional competence consisting of interrelated emotional and social skills. His research demonstrated that effective human behavior consists of multiple intrapersonal and interpersonal “competencies, skills and facilitators” (p. 2). Thus, he derived his definition of emotional-social intelligence (ESI) in order to more accurately describe this phenomenon.

Bar-On (2005) posits that understanding and expressing oneself, understanding others and successfully relating to them, and effectively coping with the day-to-day challenges and stresses are indicators of emotional-social intelligence (p. 3). Further, he suggests that the intrapersonal level is primary and is the ability to understand one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and to constructively express feelings and thoughts in addition to awareness of self (p. 3). I believe his description of the interpersonal component is closely aligned with that of Gardner with minor modifications: “the ability to be aware of others’ emotions, feelings and needs, and to establish and maintain cooperative, constructive and mutually satisfying relationships” (p. 4). He hypothesizes that if a person has a high level of emotional-social intelligence, there is a greater sense of psychological well-being (p. 5).

Bar-On's (2005) model of emotional-social intelligence consists of five clusters: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Stress Management, Adaptability, and General Mood. Each cluster is sub-divided into specific behaviors.

Daniel Goleman popularized EI taking it from the realm of research into the practical setting of corporations. He differentiated his approach to EI by identifying the clusters as competencies (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Goleman (1995) initially described his model as focusing on performance at work and organizational leadership, combining EI theory with the extensive research that has identified the competencies defining exceptional performance from average. Goleman, working closely with Boyatzis in 1999, evolved a more comprehensive definition: "Emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation" (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rehee, 2000, p. 3).

Further, Boyatzis et al. (2000) suggest the implication of performance within a work setting combined with integrated personality theory are the underpinnings of the competency clusters required for predicting performance "and making links to all levels of the human psyche" (p. 2). Through extensive research, Goleman built a five-cluster model each consisting of desired competencies. These clusters or behavioral groups are segmented into Personal and Social Competencies. The former include the clusters of: self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation; the latter include the clusters of: social awareness and social skills (EI Consortium, 2006).

Goleman (1995) considers self-awareness as the keystone to the other clusters. He defines it as a neutral or self-reflective state in which the mind is observing one's emotions as they occur (EI Consortium, 2006; Boyatzis, 2000).

Self-regulation is the ability to maintain an emotional balance (Goleman, 1995) and manage one's impulses (EI Consortium, 2006; Boyatzis, 2000). The sum total of this cluster, in my opinion, is the ability to manage oneself, personal congruity, adaptability to changing environmental influences, and the ability to receive and integrate new input.

Self-motivation, the last cluster under Personal Competency, I believe, addresses internal drives and worldview that lead to successful pursuit of goals.

Social Awareness, the first cluster of Social Competency, appears to focus on oneself in relationship to others and environmental influences. The final cluster, Social Skills, again in my opinion, address one's ability to effectively influence others as well as build and



maintain relationships. A description of each group and their associated clusters are included in Appendix E.

I propose that each of the models described provides a valid theoretical base. Mayer and Salovey define EI as ability-based. Their focus is on objective, performance-based assessments, keeping their model aligned with the traditional intelligence measurements and independent of personality traits (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; Livingstone & Day, 2005). Bar-On and Goleman's models are considered mixed-models because they include personality traits within their definition of EI (Mayer, 2006, Livingstone & Day, 2005). Perhaps Emmerling and Goleman (2003) best summarize the differences:

*Where Bar-On seeks to develop a general measure of social and emotional well-being and adaptation, and Mayer and Salovey seek to establish the validity and utility of a new form of intelligence, the model of Goleman seeks to develop a theory of work performance based on social and emotional competencies (p. 17).*

#### Can Emotional Intelligence be Developed?

As noted above, the three models that are generally accepted, defines and measures EI differently. While proponents of each model assert that EI can be developed, they are, in fact, addressing different behaviors or abilities.

Research is being actively pursued to measure EI development in children while less so, but still actively, with adults. Consequently, the majority of the literature focuses on the former. The proponents of the various EI models suggest the answer to the question is yes, EI can be developed in adults. However, others posit that additional research is required to empirically verify this.

Hamachek (2002), in an abstract of his article, suggests that individual self-understanding continues to develop through interacting with one's environment and with others; through introspection, by comparing and contrasting one's behavior to that of others; and through self-reflection. He further suggests there are multiple intrapsychic benefits to self-development: increased clarity, increased self-complexity, and increased self-certainty. I propose that implicit in Hamachek's proposition is one's desire to further develop in this domain. This desire may indicate a higher EI baseline.

According to Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2001), EI increases with age as demonstrated by their research across the age ranges they used in their cross-sectional analysis (p. 232). They state that traditional cognitive intelligence increases with age as

well. This last statement is consistent with Mayer, et al.'s theory of EI being ability based as is traditional IQ.

As with other cognitive behaviors, EI can, in my opinion, be developed, but it takes high motivation, awareness, perseverance, and practice to develop this ability.

### The Impact of Gender Differences

As noted in the section on moral development, Gilligan (1982) suggests that women view ethics from a distinctly different perspective than that of men. Extensive research into the validity of Gilligan has been conducted (e.g., Gump, 1994; Derry, 1987, 1989; Gilligan and Attanucci, 1988) which indicates that gender differences may be directly affected by the culture or environment. This was particularly evident in Derry's (1989) research when she found there were no preferences in the moral reasoning of female and male managers. She attributed this to the context in which these decisions were made and that men and women are trained to adopt the behavior of the corporate culture (p. 859). Glover, Bumpus, Logan and Ciesla (1997) examined the relationship between individual values and ethical decision making. They found that, in fact, women were more likely to favor ethical decisions over economic decision choices (p. 1324). Perhaps one could say that the women are more relationship-oriented while the men are more task-oriented. Given these conflicting research results, it will be interesting to see what future research will reveal.

There is also limited research on the correlation of EI and gender. While there are some results using the Goleman and Bar-On models, there are even fewer results from the model of Mayer, et al. (1999). Mandell and Pherwani (2003) confirm this scarcity as part of their research into the relationship of gender and EI in the context of transformational leadership. They note that in a 1999 study, Mayer, Caruso and Salovey found that women scored higher than men. This finding further confirmed Mayer and Geher's earlier research (Mayer & Geher, 1996). While Mandell and Pherwani (2003) used Bar-On's EQ-i instrument, they did find that women generally scored higher than men (p. 391). However, there is not enough research or literature to draw conclusive evidence. It appears from the literature review, there is a need for additional research to further determine the impact gender has on EI.

### Discussion

#### Findings

The findings presented in this paper are projected based on the literature review combined with new perspectives. Each question is posed again followed by a suppositions supported by evidence from current research.

*Question 1: Is there a correlation between emotional intelligence and ethical decision making?*

There does appear to be a correlation. While there is controversy regarding the direct relationship between moral reasoning and ethical decision making, I propose that one does exist based on the assertion made by Rest, Thoma, and Edwards (1997) that the construct of moral reasoning cuts across cognition, attitudes, and behavior (p. 21).

Additionally, Cherniss (2000) notes that a study conducted by Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, and Mayer (1999) found that those who have increased ability in perceiving, understanding, and appraising others' emotions also demonstrated higher flexibility to social environmental changes (p. 4). This leads me to conclude that individuals with higher EI also have a higher sensitivity to the needs of others when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Emmerling and Goleman (2003) suggest the exploration of the intersection of EI and ethics may have significant implications. Further, they refer to Goleman's studies (1995, 1998) wherein he postulates that some dimensions of EI promote "prosocial behavior" (p. 26). They also reflect on the extent to which empathy and self-awareness influences a "positive ethical outlook" (p. 26). As stated in the literature review, Gardner (2004) also alludes to the relationship of high intrapersonal intelligence and its effect on making what he calls judicious decisions (p. 39). However, there is no empirical evidence to support either Emmerling and Goleman or Gardner's statements.

Scott (2004) found there to be a significant relationship between EI and ethical decision making. She asserts, based on her findings, that EI is a predictor of ethical decision making.

Previous research has demonstrated that successful leaders tend to have higher EI scores (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Sivanathan & Fekken, 2002; Higgs & Aitken, 2003; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Depending on the organizational culture and size, managers also tend to have higher moral reasoning skills. This may be partly due to their educational level (Trevino, 1992; Holian, 2002; Ford & Richardson, 1994).

*Question 2: Can emotional intelligence be increased as a result of a corporate training and coaching intervention?*

According to multiple researchers in EI, the abilities, competencies, and traits associated with EI can be developed (Bar-On, 2005; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Boyatzis, 2000; Chastukhina, 2003; Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 1999; Emmerling

& Goleman, 2003). While there is a general consensus that social and emotional learning can occur, researchers seem to agree it is more challenging since it requires neurological rewiring. In other words, new neural pathways need to be built between the amygdala and the prefrontal lobes of the brain (Cherniss & Goleman, 1998, p. 5). This process takes time, learner commitment, structure, repetitiveness, and organizational support. These requirements are similar to those activities required for any behavioral change.

Mayer, Salovey, Caruso and Sitarenios (2005) support the notion that EI does develop over time similar to the traditional cognitive intelligence. Bar-On (2005) also agrees that EI continues to develop with maturation. These researchers have quantifiable data to support their positions.

There are two recurring themes that are consistent in each of the researcher's theory of EI development: time and experience (practice). In *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell makes an interesting statement regarding the power of the subconscious:

*It doesn't seem like we have much control over whatever bubbles to the surface from our unconscious. But we do, and if we can control the environment in which rapid cognition takes place, then we can control rapid cognition (2005, p. 253).*

He suggests that it is through exposure and broadening experiences that one's unconscious thinking changes (p. 97). I believe that Gladwell's proposition is relevant when discussing EI development. It stands to reason that training interventions can increase awareness and provide an opportunity to apply new skills that then become part of the unconscious mind.

There is extensive literature indicating that people in management positions tend to have higher EI than non-management employees (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Cavallo & Brienza, 2004; Alloway, 2004; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Higgs & Aitken, 2003). Based on these results, one could surmise that training can, at a minimum, increase awareness of EI and ultimately begin skill building.

*Question 3: Are there gender-based differences as they pertain to the relationship between emotional intelligence and ethical decision making?*

The question of the influence of gender on EI is another area of controversy. As noted earlier, there is limited research providing empirical support to the contention that gender differences do exist. The findings, however, suggest if there is a difference, women tend to score higher on EI (Mayer & Geher, 1996; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso,

1999; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Cavallo & Brienza, 2004; Alloway, 2004; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003).

The same controversy exists for ethical decision making. Derry (1989), using Gilligan's (1982) theory of the ethics of care versus the ethics of justice, found no differences between men and women as to which they choose: care or justice. But rather, it appeared to be contextually driven. Stookey's (1995) findings are concurrent with those of Derry. Glover et al. (1997) have found that women tend to make more "humanistic" decisions (p. 1322). Additionally, Narvaez (2005), in her review of the Defining Issues Test (DIT), found that gender had a minimal impact (<.1% of variance) slightly favoring women (p. 130), confirming the findings of Rest et al., (1986) (Trevino, 1992, p. 451).

None of these studies attempted to draw a correlation between EI and ethical decision making. Nor, did they address the question of the efficacy of training and coaching to increase abilities in EI, ultimately leading to better ethical decision making. Scott (2004) did conduct research into this relationship. However, in addition to gender, Scott also included age and education as variables. She found, that gender, as an independent variable, had no statistical significance ( $p = .782$ ) in this relationship.

The data from this study indicates there is, in fact, a slight difference in the scores for the male and female subjects when it comes to EI. This is of little surprise since women tend to be more interdependent and men more independent (Derry, 1989, p. 859). However, this minimal difference may demonstrate the role EI plays in overall managerial success, thus decreasing the gap between men and women.

According to Derry (1989), men and women when in management roles, are more likely to conform to the ethics of the corporation rather than their own because they are trained to "think and judge as corporate members" (p. 859). There is a plethora of other studies that support this proposition (Rest, 1986; Ford & Richardson, 1994; Loe, Ferrell, & Mansfield, 2000; Brady & Wheeler, 1996). This raises an interesting question regarding the impact EI will actually have if the corporate culture supersedes individual preferences or values.

## Conclusion

There are a number of additional conclusions that one can draw from this research. Several of these conclusions are philosophical while others have more practical implications.

The philosophical conclusions are important since they provide food for additional debate and, perhaps, the stimulus for further research. The most obvious is that ethical

decision making and self-awareness are complex topics that have been passionately debated by philosophers and researchers for centuries. They are, in fact, core issues of our humanity. Therefore, there is a high probability the hypothesis will continue to be debated despite empirical evidence supporting one theory or another.

Emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, and moral development cannot, in my opinion, be isolated from the context of a person's life. While this appears to be an obvious statement, the majority of research studies, are conducted in controlled environments exploring one or a limited number of variables. Contingent and mediating variables as well as addressing validity and reliability issues attempt to acknowledge the impact other factors may have on the results. However, any or all of these factors can potentially skew data. It may be erroneous to think in terms of absolutism when it comes to defining the correlation between EI and ethical decision making since the interactions of human beings with each other and their environment is influenced by a myriad of factors.

The first conclusion with practical implications is that there appears to be a correlation between EI and ethical decision making. I predicate my statement on the premise that EI provides a systemic worldview, broadening one's focus from ego-centric to that of oneself in relationship to others. Therefore, ethical dilemmas are resolved with an increased awareness of their consequences on oneself, others, the immediate environment, and the organization.

When I embarked on this study, I proposed that EI could be developed in a training session, overlooking its behavioral basis. It is apparent from the literature review that, while EI can be developed, it takes a significant commitment on the part of the individual, an extended time period, and a supportive environment to achieve results. It was interesting to note that EI, as with the tradition intelligence, does develop as part of the normal maturation process according to Goleman (1995), Bar-On (2005) and Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2003). Perhaps another way of defining maturation is the accumulation of experiences resulting in increased knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, it may be possible to accelerate the development of EI through knowledge sharing between different organizational and demographic groups.

There is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes an ethical dilemma since it is subject to individual interpretation. What challenges one person's values may not be challenging to another. This may be a strong argument for having a code of ethics defining ethical norms. This conclusion counters an earlier supposition that external rules may be unnecessary. An optimum solution may be to combine a culture that supports EI coupled with explicit codes of conduct delineating the boundaries of ethical behavior.

Gender does appear to have a slight influence. Researchers have found women have a tendency to exhibit higher empathy and awareness of self. However, it appears that the gender gap decreases in managerial roles. This reinforces the notion that successful managers are more likely to have higher EI.

While there is a gender-based difference in moral reasoning, it appears to be insignificant. The influence that overrides these differences within a corporate setting is the role of the individual as well as the culture itself. As Derry (1989) noted, both men and women seemingly make decisions based on being good corporate citizens, giving priority to the needs of the organization over their own or others. This perspective has the potential for resulting in cognitive dissonance as Lii (2001) suggested, forcing managers to either leave the company or compromise his/her values for personal gains.

Is there a correlation between EI and ethical decision making? Based on the results of this study, one can conclude yes, there is one. Would the intervention of the training and three-month coaching session produce the anticipated results? Yes, on a short-term basis. Long-term results require extensive reinforcement and practice. Does gender have an impact on EI and ethical decision making? Yes, but it appears to be insignificant.

### Recommendations

This research revealed the fact there is limited empirical research in determining the correlation between EI and ethical decision making in a corporate setting regardless of which EI model is used.

Several secondary questions were noted earlier, suggesting their answers may surface during this study. While one was answered (the link between moral reasoning and EI), three remain open for exploration: (1) Does EI compensate for a deficit in moral development?, (2) Does EI contribute to maintaining an environment of ethical behavior when an individual or organization is faced with extreme circumstances?, and (3) Can EI create a common basis for ethical decision making regardless of age, gender, race or cultural background? There is one more question, I believe, worth further research: is there a relationship between EI, systemic thinking, and ethical decision making?

There are also multiple variables that can further effect the correlation of EI to ethical decision making that are worth investigating, adding to the body of knowledge. Several of these include: (1) demographics such as age, race, and culture; (2) the number of direct reports to the manager; (3) senior versus middle management; and (4) managers compared to other staff members.

Given the increasing complexity of the business environment, managers will continue to be faced with situations that challenge their values and decision-making abilities. Therefore, continued exploration of the correlation between emotional intelligence and ethical decision making, to either prove or disprove its viability, can make a significant contribution to further our understanding of human performance.



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