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Empirical research on ethics: The influence of social roles on decisions and on their ethical justification

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ABSTRACT

Two questionnaire studies try to answer the question if different social roles lead to different decisions and justifications concerning ethical problems. In study I participants were asked to decide on an economic problem (Should the production of a mobile company be transferred abroad?) while going into a related social role, in study II role expectations were asked for. The decision had to be justified by weighing the importance of four classical ethical positions: hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology. The results show that decisions and their justifications are dependent on social roles. The effect, which is interpreted as stemming from social standardization, is greater for role-behavior. The differences between role-behavior and role-expectation indicate a misunderstanding crucial for group decisions.

KEY WORDS: *social role, social standardization, ethics, justification*

The following studies try to enlighten the influence of social roles on decisions and their ethical justifications. Social roles are looked upon as critical features of decision makers, even more accentuated, obvious, and influencing in a group context. Ethics commissions deliver such a group context. They debate about right and wrong, have to make a decision and are requested to justify it. Each social role is connected to role expectations and to role behavior; decision-making and the justification of a decision are likely to be influenced by both role behavior and role expectations. Thus, the first study focuses on role simulations. Participants were asked to go into a defined social role and to act correspondingly (internal perspective). The second study poses the

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questions which way of acting people expect from keepers of different social roles (external perspective).

Ethical questions are demanding answers more urgently than ever. Recently, the Schiavo case agitated people all over the world and split them up into advocates and opponents of euthanasia. Gene manipulation is widely and contentiously discussed, lately triggered by a Korean researcher on the go. Not only medical questions and questions due to ever-advancing biotechnological feasibilities (Mitcham, 1990) keep the world busy but also problems of politics and society, environment and business: How can the war on Iraq be ethically justified? How should war prisoners be treated? Should the Kyoto convention on climate change be ratified? Is it right to begin a trade war on textiles with China? It is not surprising that commissions deliberating ethical problems are more and more common and increasing in number. Although they decide, or at least give recommendations, about life and death, peace and war, just and unjust, very little is known about their way of working and factors influencing their decisions. A look back into history shows that groups are in general are vulnerable to mistakes. And wrong decisions can have serious consequences (Janis, 1972; Tuchman, 1984).

Any time people debate about ethical problems it becomes evident that societies are divided into several subgroups of people who differ in their way of value-thinking. Conflicts arise, whenever people try to come to an agreement as to the offering of gene-manipulated food, the legality of different rites of burial, the usage of cannabis in medicine, or whatever ethical questions come up. These conflicts comprise not only decisions between consent and rejection, but also the ethical positions behind these decisions. People justify their decisions referring to different ethical positions. Empirical research on ethics found four different ethical positions: utilitarianism, deontology, hedonism, and intuitionism (see chapter about ethical positions). People weight these ethical positions differently depending on the issue they are justifying.

A question follows these implications: Which is the attribute that causes people to decide one way or the other and that provokes schemes of justifications? The answer may lie in the social roles people keep. The society can be seen as composed of by role-keepers. This point of view implicates two effects:

1. Social roles influence values and value-thinking.
2. Social roles do not only influence actual behavior. Each social role triggers expectations as to role behavior.

Thus, the society is fragmented into groups of people who prefer different decisions as to ethical problems and who justify their decisions referring to different values. Another aspect apart from competing values may lead to conflicts: the incongruity between role behavior and role expectations. If role

behavior and expectations diverge and people do not behave according to the expectations their social role arises, this may lead to deep misunderstandings. The debate about fundamental ethical problems could be lastingly disturbed because of such misunderstandings. An example for such a misunderstanding may be a catholic priest fighting for the women's right to abort.

The studies try to answer the question, if there is a connection between the social role someone holds and the decision and its justification concerning an ethical problem. Thereby it is of special interest whether decisions and their justifications are socially standardized. The following general hypotheses are to be tested:

H1: Social standardizations influence ethical decisions and their justifications by means of general value orientation and social roles. These standardizations can be made explicit by the different weighing of the four ethical positions.

A second question of investigation refers to the match between actual behavior of someone holding a special social role and the expectations towards this person.

H2: There are differences concerning ethical decisions and their justifications between the conditions role behavior and role expectation measured through the importance ratings of the four ethical positions.

Hitherto, these connections have not been analyzed. In the scope of a growing number of ethics commissions and their decisions concerning questions of life and death and sometimes affecting whole nations, a survey of influencing factors of these decisions and their justifications seems necessary.

In the following, theoretical background as to ethics commissions, social roles, and ethical positions is given.

ETHICS COMMISSIONS

When forming a commission, members representing special professions, fields of expertise or ideologies are selected. Such a commission can be seen as a mirror of what takes place in society as a whole. Generally defined, ethics consultation is "a service provided by an individual consultant, team, or committee to address the ethical issues involved in a specific case" (Tulsky & Fox, 1996, p. 112). Ethics committees and commissions are multidisciplinary composed ethical advisory bodies in the form of small groups; they work in a defined institutional context and should meet a special advisory need; they especially reflect the morally problematic part of issues and problems.

Ethics commissions can be characterized concerning several factors with different specifications:

- political level or institutional dependence: from panels of individual hospitals up to national commissions (e.g. President's Council on Bioethics, 2001)
- composition of their members: representatives of different sciences, sometimes of political parties
- topics: often problems concerning medical practice or bio-/gene technology
- application: e.g. advice, recommendation, information, control of norms, and
- type of statement: consensus, votes for several voices, or neutral option catalogues.

Ethics commissions have various faces. Albeit the committees' variety and increasing number (McGee, Spanogle, Caplan & Asch, 2001), the knowledge about them does not meet the number and use of ethics committees. What is known about them refers mainly to hospital ethics committees and comprises statistical data (e.g. McGee, Spanogle, Caplan, Penny & Asch, 2002) such as the quantity of commissions, the number and professions of their members or the type of medical problems discussed (organ donation, child treatment, life-prolonging measures, etc.). Even if the work of ethics commissions is analyzed, it does not always lead to expanded knowledge. Tulsy and Fox (1996) identified 42 empirical studies on the evaluation of clinical ethics commissions in the USA and Canada (no time period mentioned). They stated that all of these studies were in some way methodologically flawed and only relatively few evaluative conclusions about ethics consultation could be made. The group processes within ethics commissions, their way of working, and the quality of their results are more or less a "black box" (Witte, 1991).

Normally, the advantage of commissions is seen as greatly due to their members: different experts come together to join and exchange their specific knowledge and to complement each others' perspective. The implications behind this procedure are not looked at. From a social psychological point of view, the work of ethics commissions is a complex group task (Witte, 2002a; Witte & Heitkamp, 2005). Groups are characterized by a variety of losses (Steiner, 1972). Many of them refer directly to group members: groupthink (Esser, 1998; Janis, 1972), power (French & Raven, 1968) or restricting group norms (Postmes, Spears & Cihangir, 2001) for example.

Group members (Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000) belong to the basic elements of groups – and therefore of ethics commissions as well. – belong group members (Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000). Their composition can influence many aspects of group life, including group structure, dynamics, and performance (Moreland, Levine & Wingert, 1996). An eye-catching and basic feature of group members is their social role. Each group member keeps a social role while representing a profession, field of expertise or ideology. Look-

ing at social roles may thus be a first step to better understand the dynamics behind ethics commissions and may help to improve their work.

SOCIAL ROLES

The gathering of people who keep different social roles is a common attempt to try to handle ethical un-certainty and to gain rational reasoning. These studies focus on a salient and influencing characteristic of commissions' members: the social role. The social role is a well- established category of every-day life with stereotyped images like doctor, priest, or housewife (Goffman, 1961) which are dimensions of the social identity (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi & Ethier, 1995). Tacit ground rules form social identities and make everyday life possible (Chriss, 1999). While there seems to be a tendency towards a consensus about the contents of roles (Cosser, 1991; Turner, 1972), the definitions of "role" diverge. On the one hand, social role is defined as "the typical response of individuals in a particular position" (Goffman, 1961, p. 93), a definition which concentrates on behavior. On the other hand, there are definitions which focus on the expectation towards role keepers (Woodland, 1968). Role is the "expectation held by the group for how members in particular positions ought to behave" (Kenrick, Neuberg & Cialdini, 2005, p. 400). Because each definition alone forms a stereotype (Turner & Colomy, 1993), the synthesis of both seems to be adequate: the role is the point of intersection between the behavior orientations of actors, the expectations of others and the functional requirements of the society (Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983). Definitions of social role stress role behavior, role expectations, or both. It is not clear to what extent role expectations and role behavior go together. It is likely that there are differences between role behavior and role expectation because of the differences of cognition and conation.

Close to social roles are social norms. The definition of social norm by Kenrick, Neuberg and Cialdini (2005) is: "A rule or expectation for appropriate social behavior" (p. 4). Each role seems to be defined through social norms which thus have an impact on the behavior of role keepers. Social norms, which can also be conveyed through a given situation, lead to standardized interactions (Seeman, 1997).

Normally a social role is identified as an entity (Turner, 1972). In contrast to that, Turner and Colomy (1993) propose a role differentiation. They sketch three principles: functionality, representation, and tenability, which are highly interactive in their effects. Thereby, role conflict resulting from ethical situations is significantly greater than that of any other source (e.g. job, family) (Chonko & Burnett, 1983).

Every differentiating principle can be detected in the context of an ethics commission. Functionality seems to be the main principle for the composition of the committee's members. Different competencies and dispositions are associated with different professions or offices. In contrast to Turner and Colomy, conflicts of interests are thereby not avoided but wanted. An example is the committee on local water management that comprises representatives of the water works, politicians, and residents of the affected area (McDaniels, Gregory & Fields, 1999).

Another differentiating principle is representation. It is able to cover functionality (Turner and Colomy, 1993). A current example is the decision of the German National Ethics Council on cloning for reproduction or for biomedical research. Fields of expertise or offices of the commission's members ceased to play a role; they were superseded by three divergent positions which had emerged during discussion. In the end, it only mattered how many members opted for (i.e. represented) which option (see German National Ethics Council, 2004). As the members of the German National Ethics Council were not able to form a consensus, the importance of the third differentiating principle comes into consideration. This means, if a consensus had been achieved, some of the members would have given up their roles. This obviously too costly alternative must have been against the third principle: tenability.

In sum, social roles can be detected and their influence can be regarded as to be highly probable. But if and how they work is unresolved. The differentiation between functionality and representation of roles (e.g. profession and decision of a committee member) appears to be noteworthy. It has to be shown how far social roles are functional as schemes and models for personal behavior (Athay & Darley, 1982). Because social roles are associated with duties, norms, and expectations (Donahue, Robins, Roberts & John, 1993), the influence of social roles is especially crucial in the area of ethical decisions and their justification: Is everyone able to decide freely and rationally or can roles lead to standardized decisions and judgments which do not mirror the real situation? What if people do not feel free to decide individually but will orientate themselves in accordance to social norms? Do people assume potential norms or do such norms really exist? What would standardizations mean for decisions and their ethical justifications?

ETHICAL POSITIONS

This study tries to analyze the connection between value orientation, social roles, decisions and their justification. Above, the influence of social roles on behavior and cognition is displayed. Now shall be presented how ethical posi-

tions which are the main aspects of values can be measured.

The general question is: How can decisions be ethically justified at all? Psychological research on ethics is not in the focus of active research, with one exception: the research on justice (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith & Huo, 1997).

Ethical research can be compared to a medal with two sides: one side refers to ethics theory, which means to thousands of years of philosophy (Mac Intyre, 1976), the other one refers to empirical psychology. Both sides can be conjoined in one of our research question that is if theoretical ethical positions of practical philosophy can be found empirically. The psychological perspective should be value-free.¹ In contrast to philosophy, psychology is not interested in ascertaining the however-based superiority of one position. Psychology is only interested in the given facts of empiricism. The question behind it is not how people should justify their actions but rather how they do it in practice and what factors influence their justifications. For example the connection between identity, moral cognition (e.g. justification) and behavior (e.g. decision) is of interest (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Normative ethical positions which are empirically stated are hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology, (Witte, 2001, 2002b, 2002c; Witte & Doll, 1995).

The meanings of these value attitudes have also been similarly found. Hedonism goes back to Aristippos and contains that an action has to be performed when it brings pleasure to oneself. This could be intermingled with egoism but it does not have to be. To formulate it in a more neutral way, the action performed should not be in opposition to the individual human dignity (Witte & Doll, 1995). Intuitionism considers the reason for an action as stemming from individual insight or individual feeling. Intuitionism prevents justifications from running to a dead end, to an endless regress (Rawls, 1971; Witte & Doll, 1995). Utilitarianism prescribes to perform that action which brings the greatest happiness for the greatest number (of feeling beings). It is associated with the names of J. Bentham and J. S. Mill. In contrast to utilitarianism, from a deontological point of view the end does not justify the means, but the means themselves underlie the need of justification. According to deontology, justifications should match universal principles such as the categorical imperative (see I. Kant). Empirically, people assign various degrees of importance to all four ethical positions (Witte, 2002b, 2002c). The four ethical positions can be included in a taxonomy, which takes two dimensions into account: content matter and the level of the judgment (table 1).

Forsyth and colleagues (Barnett, Bass, Brown & Hebert, 1998; Forsyth, 1980, 1992; Forsyth & Nye, 1990; Forsyth & Pope, 1984) found similar ethical positions. But they represent the point of view of personality psychology, define

Table 1. Taxonomy of the four ethical positions (Witte & Doll, 1995)

Content matter	End/Consequence	Mean/Rule
Level of judgement		
Personal	Hedonism (I am concerned with my personal well-being.)	Intuitionism (I am sure that this action is appropriate.)
General	Utilitarianism (In my opinion, one has to consider the consequences of an action for everyone.)	Deontology (In my opinion, general principles serve as guidelines for our actions.)

the theoretical background of positions slightly differently and use a taxonomy based on the scales relativism and idealism with the values high and low. Their approach of the empirical ethics research differs from the one presented here.

It is essential that “different ethical judgments do not imply different ethical frameworks and similar ethical judgments do not imply similar ethical frameworks“ (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, p. 14). In line with this statement ethical positions have been found empirically in different contexts. The importance of different value attitudes varies with culture (Maeng, 1995), with the quality of the actions that have to be justified (individual, interpersonal, social actions) (Witte & Doll, 1995), with social identity (Gollenia, 1999), and with professional socialization (Hackel, 1995).²

The variation with profession is especially important for this study, which puts its stress on different social roles or professions members of (ethics) commissions have, respectively. Gollenia (1999) asked people of three different professional backgrounds, economic, medical, and juridical, how they justify the germline therapy. She found that economists prefer hedonistic positions, but that physicians and jurists favor utilitarian and deontological positions. Many studies empirically found connections between ethical decisions, actions, and ethical positions in an economic context (e.g. Akaah & Riordan, 1989; Barnett et al., 1998; Tansey, Brown, Hyman & Dawson, 1994). It is proved that economists prefer utilitarianism when it comes down to economic decisions (Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Premeaux & Mondy, 1993). Is that also true for other role-keepers in an economic context?

It is likely that these results can be transferred to the contexts of (ethics) commissions: members of distinct fields of expertise or professions should come to dissimilar decisions and emphasize varying ethical positions as being

important for their decision. On the one hand, this would strengthen the claim for gathering people of various backgrounds because only in this way optimal results could be attained in a commission. On the other hand, a new question arises: If people actually decide and justify according to their social roles, would this mean that the decisions made by (ethics) commissions are not only predictable but also suggestible? Thus, the decision depends on the role keepers represented in the committee and might be manipulated by the organizer.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS DESIGN

An ethical problem of an economic context was provided, since problems of business ethics are fervidly discussed (for example in the media). Especially the loss of parent jobs is debated on because of production-transfer to another country – the efficiency of the company is in opposition to parent jobs (e.g. Geishecker & Gørg, 2004; Konings & Murphy, 2001). The economic problem presented the questionnaire study outlines the dilemma of a fictitious mobile company trying to work efficiently and to save German workplaces at the same time: “Should the production be transferred abroad and thus jobs being cut in order to save the company as a whole?” Each participant had to decide on the economic question while going into a related social role (study I) or while expressing expectations of the behavior of someone holding a special social role (study II). Each participant is linked to one social role, so that the study follows a 1 x 6 -design. The subjects were assigned randomly to the roles. The social roles are: member of the board of management, member of the supervisory board, labor union representative, employee of administration, external consultant, and politician. These 6 roles comprise a broad spectrum of positions and opinions, but at large, they were chosen at random. Partly, they include contrarian advocacy groups, which is also the case in real groups discussing a problem.

Each participant had to fill out a questionnaire containing

- a) a general decision on the main question,
- b) 20 questions on the justification of the decision using ethical positions, and
- c) personal data.

The 20-questions-part comprises four to six statements to every ethical position whose importance had to be marked with a cross on a five-point-scale (from 1 = not important to 5 = very important). Examples of items are “I am concerned for my personal well-being.” for hedonism, “I am sure that this is the right behavior.” for intuitionism, “In my opinion, one has to consider the consequences for everyone.” for utilitarianism, and “In my opinion, general values are decisive for behavior.” for deontology. There is empirical evidence

of the quality of the questionnaire which has been developed by Witte and Doll (1995). Since then it has been tested repeatedly and proved as a reliable, suitable instrument to measure ethical positions (Gollenia, 1999; Hackel, 1995; Maeng, 1995).

SAMPLE

All subjects took part voluntarily, they did not receive a payment. Students from the University of Hamburg make for the greatest part of the sample. Students of psychology got a certificate for being subjects in research. Several certificates are needed by students of psychology to be admitted to the diploma exams. People were contacted directly, for example before lectures at university. An online-version of the questionnaire was posted on the web-pages of the Department of Psychology of the University of Hamburg and 74 subjects filled it out (only study II).

Study I

682 subjects took part: 383 females and 288 males. 11 persons did not mention their gender. On the average the age was 27.4 years. The youngest subject was 17 of age, the oldest one was 81. 21.7% of the subjects mentioned a university grade as their highest educational achievement. 66.7% mentioned a university-entrance diploma. It is not possible to determine the proportion of students.

Study II

551 subjects took part: 275 females and 256 males. 20 persons did not mention their gender. On the average the age was 30.5 years. The youngest subject was 15 of age, the oldest one was 70. 24.8% of the subjects mentioned a university grade as their highest educational achievement. 54.2% mentioned a university-entrance diploma. 49.1% of the participants were students. 74 participants filled out an online-questionnaire, which was exactly like the paper-and-pencil version.

RESULTS

Because study I and II were similar apart from their perspectives and in order to be able to compare their results directly, their findings are described one straight after the other.

Results concerning ethical positions

In study I, a factor analysis of 19 items (item 10 for intuitionism had to be excluded to strengthen Cronbach's alpha) could educe the four ethical positions (number of factors set to four). 51.7% of the variance could be explained. Hedonism cleared up 15.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.93), deontology 13.1% (eigenvalue = 2.50), intuitionism 11.7% (eigenvalue = 2.67), and utilitarianism cleared up 10.89% (eigenvalue = 2.07) after varimax rotation (table 2).

Table 2. Rotated matrix of components; matrix of loadings after varimax-rotation

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Item 1 (hedonism)	.092	.675	.268	.043
Item 2 (intuitionism)	.452	.281	-.424	.177
Item 3 (utilitarianism)	.540	-.169	.116	.426
Item 4 (deontology)	.457	.063	-.137	-.383
Item 5 (hedonism)	.412	.455	.329	.203
Item 6 (intuitionism)	.564	.117	-.322	.150
Item 7 (utilitarianism)	.387	-.084	-.160	.560
Item 8 (deontology)	.608	-.151	.313	-.193
Item 9 (hedonism)	-.148	.729	.018	.173
Item 11 (hedonism)	-.016	.570	.066	-.057
Item 12 (utilitarianism)	.574	-.428	.360	.106
Item 13 (deontology)	.564	-.060	.247	-.323
Item 14 (hedonism)	-.056	.766	.234	.015
Item 15 (intuitionism)	.281	.404	-.421	-.431
Item 16 (utilitarianism)	.548	-.284	.128	.150
Item 17 (deontology)	.621	-.060	.150	-.450
Item 18 (hedonism)	.247	.657	.268	.056
Item 19 (intuitionism)	.423	.228	-.576	-.009
Item 20 (utilitarianism)	.503	.010	-.221	.096

In study II, a factor analysis of the 20 items could educe the four ethical positions. Totally, 55.3% of the variance could be explained. Utilitarianism cleared up 21.2% of the variance (eigenvalue = 4.23), hedonism 16.1% (eigenvalue = 3.22), intuitionism 10.3% (eigenvalue = 2.08), and deontology cleared up 7.7% (eigenvalue = 1.53) after varimax rotation (table 3).

Table 3. Rotated matrix of components; matrix of loadings after varimax-rotation

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Item 1 (hedonism)	-.190	.709	-.001	.024
Item 2 (intuitionism)	.095	.020	.640	.248
Item 3 (utilitarianism)	.500	.045	.424	-.190
Item 4 (deontology)	.286	-.187	.268	.506
Item 5 (hedonism)	.261	.599	.315	-.077
Item 6 (intuitionism)	.108	.034	.732	-.015
Item 7 (utilitarianism)	.635	-.076	.299	-.103
Item 8 (deontology)	.786	.035	-.181	.141
Item 9 (hedonism)	-.434	.702	-.055	.012
Item 10 (intuitionism)	-.088	.360	-.094	.626
Item 11 (hedonism)	.081	.567	-.165	.211
Item 12 (utilitarianism)	.784	-.122	-.014	-.175
Item 13 (deontology)	.830	.065	-.165	.150
Item 14 (hedonism)	-.229	.813	.036	.031
Item 15 (intuitionism)	-.180	.061	.297	.706
Item 16 (utilitarianism)	.674	-.231	.124	-.203
Item 17 (deontology)	.700	-.053	.159	.071
Item 18 (hedonism)	.035	.732	.273	.095
Item 19 (intuitionism)	-.121	.251	.571	.358
Item 20 (utilitarianism)	.450	-.183	.249	-.076

In study I, final scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) for hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology were .63, .60, .61, and .65, respectively. To reach an alpha of .60, the item "One cannot justify every decision." had to be eliminated of the intuitionism scale.

In study II, final scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) for hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology were .79, .65, .75, and .73, respectively.

There is empirical evidence of the four ethical positions derived from practical philosophy. The results suggest that the subjects accounted for all four ethical positions in both studies. These results go in line with the findings of other studies and prove to be stable.

Results concerning ethical positions

One of the first questions to answer is: Do ethical positions differ in their

importance when a decision has to be justified? A look at means and standard deviations of the ethical positions reveals that there are such differences in the estimated importance (table 4). These differences can apparently also be found between study I and II, that is between the personal weighting of importance of the four ethical positions and the expected weighting.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations (study I + II)

	Study I							
	Hed		Int		Uti		Deo	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
external consultant	3.11	0.81	3.30	0.87	3.85	0.70	3.50	0.83
member of the supervisory board	2.93	0.82	3.07	0.81	3.83	0.67	3.40	0.96
member of the board of management	2.72	0.74	3.07	0.90	3.96	0.48	3.40	0.70
labor union representative	2.85	0.69	3.14	0.93	4.13	0.61	3.47	0.75
employee of administration	3.47	0.66	3.24	0.71	3.96	0.62	3.60	0.83
politician	2.90	0.74	3.28	0.84	3.96	0.60	3.49	0.72
economic context total	3.00	0.74	3.18	0.84	3.95	0.61	3.48	0.80
	Study II							
external consultant	2.82	0.98	3.10	0.76	3.54	0.81	2.85	0.81
member of the supervisory board	3.27	0.98	3.24	0.69	3.38	0.89	2.73	0.88
member of the board of management	3.40	0.81	3.34	0.71	3.26	0.78	2.92	0.79
labor union representative	3.01	0.76	3.13	0.74	3.96	0.68	3.70	0.80
employee of administration	3.66	0.49	3.16	0.66	3.32	0.83	3.23	0.91
politician	3.45	0.80	3.05	0.75	3.46	0.79	3.17	0.76
economic context total	3.27	0.86	3.18	0.73	3.47	0.82	3.09	0.87

Note. Data refer to a five-point-scale with 1 = not important and 5 = very important; hed = hedonism, int = intuitionism, uti = utilitarianism, deo = deontology

Secondly, it was examined to what extent variance could be explained by roles. A repeated-measures ANOVA was used with roles as between-subject factors and the four ethical scales as intraner-subject factors.

Table 5 shows the results of the repeated-measures ANOVA in study I. They indicated significant effects for the ethics scales ($F = 14.31, p < .00$). 5% of the variance could be explained by the ethics scales with utilitarianism as the most important ethical position. The interaction between ethical positions and roles explained 10% of the variance ($F = 6.43, p = < .00$). To detect differences in the justifications, post hoc t-tests were used. The significant results of

Table 5. Repeated-measures ANOVA, innersubject-design: ethics (study I + II)

	Source		<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>sign.</i>	η^2
Study I	ETHICS	sphericity assumption	3	8.09	14.31	.00	0.05
	ETHICS * ROLES	sphericity assumption	15	3.64	6.43	.00	0.10
Study II	ETHICS	sphericity assumption	3	62.44	135.24	.00	0.27
	ETHICS * ROLES	sphericity assumption	15	1.03	2.23	.00	0.03

t-tests in table 6 show that most of the differences between the roles derived from hedonism (six significant results), followed by utilitarianism (two significant results). This finding suggests that ethical positions were significant for a differentiation between the justifications of diverse role keepers. The different manners of justification between diverse role keepers occurred to justifications referring to ends and consequences.

Table 6. Significant results of post hoc t-tests between the roles (study I)

	Economic context	<i>M</i>	<i>SD.</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>sign.</i>
Hedonism	employee of administration	3.47	0.66	-4.45	.00
	politician	2.90	0.74		
	employee of administration	3.47	0.66	-2.60	.01
	external consultant	3.11	0.81		
	employee of administration	3.47	0.66	-4.95	.00
	labor union representative	2.85	0.69		
	employee of administration	3.47	0.66	-3.70	.00
	member of the supervisory board	2.93	0.82		
	employee of administration	3.47	0.66	5.36	.00
	member of the board of management	2.72	0.74		
	labor union representative	2.85	0.69	2.05	.04
	external consultant	3.11	0.81		
Utilitarianism	labor union representative	4.13	0.61	2.61	.01
	member of the supervisory board	3.83	0.67		
	external consultant	3.85	0.70	-2.51	.01
	labor union representative	4.13	0.61		

Note. Data refer to a five-point-scale with 1 = not important and 5 = very important

Table 5 also shows the results of the repeated-measures ANOVA in study II. They indicated significant effects for the ethics scales ($F = 135.24, p < .00$). 27% of the variance could be explained by the ethics scales, which can be seen as a great deal of variance explained, also with utilitarianism as the most important ethical position. The interaction between ethical positions and roles explained about 3% of the variance ($F = 2.23, p = < .00$). The small value of 3% can be neglected. The significant results of t-tests in table 7 show that most of the differences between the roles derived from hedonism and deontology (each with nine significant results), followed by utilitarianism (five significant results) and intuitionism (one significant result).

Table 7. Significant results of post hoc t-tests between the roles (study II)

	Economic context	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>sign.</i>
Hedonism	external consultant	2.82	0.98	-2.12	.04
	member of the supervisory board	3.27	0.98		
	external consultant	2.82	0.98	-3.65	.00
	member of the board of management	3.40	0.81		
	external consultant	2.82	0.98	-5.53	.00
	employee of administration	3.66	0.49		
	external consultant	2.82	0.98	-3.43	.00
	politician	3.45	0.80		
	member of the supervisory board	3.27	0.98	-2.40	.02
	employee of administration	3.66	0.49		
	member of the board of management	3.40	0.81	2.62	.01
	labor union representative	3.01	0.76		
	member of the board of management	3.40	0.81	-2.20	.03
	employee of administration	3.66	0.49		
	labor union representative	3.01	0.76	-4.89	.00
employee of administration	3.66	0.49			
labor union representative	3.01	0.76	-2.66	.01	
politician	3.45	0.79			
Deontology	external consultant	2.85	0.81	-5.24	.00
	labor union representative	3.70	0.80		
	external consultant	2.85	0.81	-2.21	.03
	employee of administration	3.23	0.91		
	member of the supervisory board	2.73	0.88	-5.22	.00
	labor union representative	3.70	0.80		
	member of the supervisory board	2.73	0.88	-2.53	.01

	employee of administration	3.23	0.91		
	member of supervisory board	2.73	0.88	-238	.02
	politician	3.17	0.76		
	member of the board of management	2.92	0.79	-5.24	.00
	labor union representative	3.70	0.80		
	member of the board of management	2.92	0.79	-2.00	.05
	employee of administration	3.23	0.91		
	labor union representative	3.70	0.80	2.65	.01
	employee of administration	3.23	0.91		
	labor union representative	3.70	0.80	3.24	.00
	politician	3.17	0.76		
Utilitarianism	external consultant	3.54	0.81	-2.77	.01
	labor union representative	3.96	0.68		
	member of the supervisory board	3.38	0.89	-3.24	.00
	labor union representative	3.95	0.68		
	member of the board of management	3.26	0.78	-5.00	.00
	labor union representative	3.96	0.68		
	labor union representative	3.95	0.68	4.67	.00
	employee of administration	3.32	0.83		
	labor union representative	3.96	0.68	3.19	.00
	politician	3.46	0.79		
Intuitionism	member of the board of management	3.34	0.71	2.15	.03
	politician	3.05	0.75		

Note. Data refer to a five-point-scale with 1 = not important and 5 = very important

Taken together, there were differences in the weighing of the ethical positions between value-orientation, the conditions role-behavior (study I) and role-expectation (study II). With role-expectation more variance could be explained by differences of ethical justifications than with role-behavior (27% vs. 5%). The variance explained by the interaction of ethics and roles was rather low, but in comparison it was higher for role-behavior than for role-expectation (10% vs. 3%).

The comparison between the conditions role-behavior and role-expectation leads to the conclusion that for role-expectation the personal interpretation of the social role is greater than for role-behavior. This also means that expected patterns of ethical positions seem to be more personal than that for the justification of one's own behavior.

Results concerning the connection of decision, justification, and role

The question which led to the next step was if there is a connection between decision, justification, and role. Multiple correlations were used with decision as dependent variable and the four ethics scales and the roles as independent variables. The object was to determine to what extent the individual decisions could be predicted by the individual importance weights of the ethical positions. Significant multiple correlations indicate individual freedom to choose and justify the decision between roles and in roles. If instead social norms dictate a decision the variance will be small and thus lead to an insignificant correlation.

Table 8 shows the results of the multiple correlations in study I and II. In study I, intuitionism, utilitarian-ism, and deontology could explain the individual decisions. These ethical positions could contribute significantly to the prediction of the individual decision. In contrast to that, the factor role did not contribute to the prediction. The interpretation was interindividually standardized, as expected from the theoretical position and the definition of a role. Evidently, only the non-individual part of the role interpretation was important as can be gathered from the interaction of role and ethics. The effect ($\epsilon^2 = 0.15$) can be interpreted as a median effect, for Cohen (1977) determines a median effect at $\epsilon^2 = 0.15$.

In study II intuitionism and deontology – both referring to duty – could explain the individual decisions. These ethical positions could contribute significantly to the prediction of the decision. The individual interpretation of the role did also contribute independently to the prediction. Evidently, the individual part of the role interpretation was important in the part of role-expectation. The effect ($\epsilon^2 = 0.59$) can be interpreted as a high one. However, ethical decisions and ethical positions were connected significantly in both studies.

In study I, the individual interpretation of the social role did not contribute to the prediction of the decision. The subjects were able to form a consistent interpretation of role-behavior which is also an indirect validation of the ma-

Table 8. Multiple correlations: Relationships between role and ethical position (study I + II)

		sign. contribution to prognosis								
		<i>N</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>sign.</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Hed</i>	<i>Int</i>	<i>Uti</i>	<i>Deo</i>	<i>Role</i>
Study I	Economic context	368	0.37	.00	0.13	.84	.00	.00	.00	.57
Study II	Economic context	300	0.61	.00	0.37	.73	.00	.00	.35	.00

Note. hed = hedonism, int = intuitionism, uti = utilitarianism, deo = deontology

nipulation: Subjects are able to give a consistent answer taking a specific role. This was possible for the standardized part of the role, which means that the behavior was prescribed by social norms that are connected with a social role. In study II, the personal expectations about the social roles contributed to the prediction of the decision. Standardization could not be stated. The individual interpretation of the social role was responsible for its influence on the decision. It was tested whether there are differences in the connections between decision, justification, and role between the conditions role-behavior (study I) and role-expectation (study II). The above-mentioned differences between the findings of study I and II lead to acceptance.

Results concerning the connection between decision and justification

Above, the connection between decision, justification, and role was tested on a social level. It was not differentiated between different roles. Afterwards, a probable connection between decision and justification was checked. It was to be proven on an interindividual level whether the decisions could be predicted by the means of the justifications within the different roles. Multiple correlations with the decision as dependent and the four ethics scales as independent variables were used. Study I: Table 9 shows that hedonism which had

Table 9. Multiple correlations: Relationships between roles and ethical positions (study I + II)

Economic context		Sign. contribution to prognosis							
		<i>N</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>sign.</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Hed</i>	<i>Uti</i>	<i>Deo</i>	<i>Int</i>
Study I	all roles	368	0.36	.00	0.13	.86	.00	.00	.00
	external consultant	70	0.45	.01	0.20	.91	.23	.08	.01
	member of the supervisory board	54	0.48	.01	0.23	.17	.04	.13	.10
	member of the board of management	50	0.35	.21	0.12	.75	.75	.25	.07
	labor union representative	68	0.16	.80	0.03	.75	.36	.82	.43
	employee of administration	50	0.57	.00	0.32	.33	.17	.59	.00
	politician	76	0.29	.18	0.08	.15	.80	.45	.16
Study II	all roles	300	0.50	.00	0.25	.08	.02	.00	.04
	politician	44	0.32	.37	0.10	.63	.22	.51	.85
	external consultant	53	0.43	.04	0.18	.10	.51	.07	.91
	labor union representative	47	0.38	.15	0.15	.46	.14	.47	.70
	member of the supervisory board	36	0.28	.02	0.08	.93	.90	.29	.78
	employee of administration	47	0.56	.00	0.36	.70	.19	.03	.57
	member of the board of management	73	0.47	.00	0.22	.68	.07	.02	.73

Note. hed = hedonism, int = intuitionism, uti = utilitarianism, deo = deontology

been able to differentiate between roles on the basis of mean differences could not contribute significantly to the prediction of the decision, neither when single roles were considered nor when considering all roles together. The interindividual prediction did not contribute significantly. In contrast, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology contributed significantly to the prediction of the decision.

Only intuitionism was able to predict the decision of external consultants ($\epsilon^2 = 0.25$) and employee of administration ($\epsilon^2 = 0.48$). Both roles had a positive beta-weight for intuitionism (which means denial). This finding suggests that people, who act as external consultants or as employees of administration and interpret their role individually, would rather deny the production transfer abroad if they preferred intuitionist positions. These roles tolerated individual decisions in contrast to the other roles. Their decisions and justifications were standardized to a much greater extent.

In study II, intuitionism which had not been able to differentiate between roles on the basis of mean differences could contribute significantly to the prediction of the decision when considering all roles together. Utilitarianism and deontology contributed significantly to the prediction of the decision, too, which supports the results of the multiple correlation concerning the differentiation between roles. On the level of single roles, deontology was able to predict the decisions of members of the board of management and employees of administration. Both roles had a positive beta-weight for deontology (which meant denial). This finding suggests that people, who act as members of the board of management or as employees of administration and interpret their role-expectations individually, would rather deny the production transfer abroad if they preferred deontological positions. These role-expectations tolerated individual decisions in contrast to the other roles whose decisions and justifications were standardized to a much greater extent.

The decision could be predicted by the interindividually different justification of the decision. But the finding is narrowed referring to single roles and ethical positions. The decision could be predicted for two of the six roles. Taking together all roles this applied to a deontological position. The interindividual differences in these ethical positions influence the decision within specific roles. In study II the scope of the results is limited again: the decision could be predicted for two of the six roles. Taking together all roles, this applied to intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology.

The above-mentioned findings give evidence that there are differences in the connections between decision and justification between the conditions role-behavior (study I) and role-expectation (study II) within a role.

Results concerning the decisions made

It was tested whether the frequency distribution of the decision made is dependent on the role. Table 10 shows the frequency distributions as to the decision. The decision against job transfer was at a ratio of about 3:1 at large. Three-fourths of the people voted against the production transfer abroad although the ethical position of utilitarianism was most important for the justification (see above). The labor union representative was an exception: almost all of them denied a production transfer abroad (94.1%). The chi-square-test to determine whether there is a connection between decision and role became significant ($chi^2 = 96.04; p < .00$).

In study II, the decision for or against production transfer was at a ratio of about 1:1 at large. The labor union representative was an exception: almost all of them denied a production transfer abroad (95.7%). The chi-square-test to determine whether there is a connection between decision and role did not become significant ($chi^2 = 0.57; p > .44$). That means that the expected decision was not dependent on the role. The role-expectations do not seem to be as strict as it seems to be the case for role-behavior.

Table 10. Frequency distribution: decisions in the economic context (study I + II)

		Agreement		disagreement		total
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Study I	external consultant	23	33.9	47	67.1	70
	member of the supervisory board	16	29.6	38	70.4	54
	member of the board of management	15	30.0	35	70.0	50
	labor union representative	4	5.9	64	94.1	68
	employee of administration	13	26.0	37	74.0	50
	politician	19	25.0	57	75.0	76
	total	90	24.5	278	75.5	368
Study II	external consultant	40	75.5	13	24.5	53
	member of the supervisory board	28	84.8	5	15.2	33
	member of the board of management	57	77.0	17	23.0	74
	labor union representative	2	4.3	44	95.7	46
	employee of administration	22	47.8	24	52.2	46
	politician	5	11.4	38	86.4	43
	total	154	52.2	141	47.8	295

The subject of the next paragraph is whether the frequency distributions of the decisions made are dependent on the role and whether it differs between the conditions role-behavior (study I) and role-expectation (study II). To test this, a chi-square-test was calculated. Table 11 shows a comparison of frequencies of denial and acceptance between study I and II. For each role a single chi-square-test was calculated. Observed frequencies refer to study II. Anticipated frequencies are calculated on their basis and are the frequencies which would be anticipated if the results of study I had been exactly replicated. This procedure was necessary to adjust the different numbers of subjects and frequencies between study I and II. Data and results have been written in a row in each case to save space. Frequencies differed significantly between study I and II ($\chi^2 = 122.39; p < .00$). On the level of roles, only one comparison did not become significant (labor union representative). For this role, similar standardizations seem to be expressed in role-expectations and role-behaviors. For the other roles, expectations and behavior differed and suggest misunderstandings in committees if the role is known and a specific decision expected.

Table 11. Comparison of frequencies of denial and acceptance between study I and II

Role	observed frequency				anticipated frequency				<i>chi</i> ²	<i>sign.</i>
	agreement		disagreement		agreement		disagreement			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%		
external consultant	40	75.5	13	24.5	17.4	32.9	35.6	67.1	43.51	.00
member of the supervisory board	28	84.8	5	15.2	9.8	29.6	23.2	70.4	48.34	.00
member of the board of management	57	78.1	16	21.9	21.9	30.0	51.1	70.0	80.37	.00
labor union representative	2	4.3	45	95.7	2.8	5.9	44.2	94.1	0.23	.63
employee of administration	22	47.8	24	52.2	12.0	26.0	34.0	74.0	11.39	.00
politician	5	11.6	38	88.4	10.8	25.0	32.3	75.0	4.10	.04
Economic context total	154	52.2	141	47.8	72.3	24.5	222.7	75.5	122.39	.00

Note. Observed frequencies refer to study II; anticipated frequencies are calculated on their basis and are the frequencies which would be anticipated if the results of study I had been exactly replicated

DISCUSSION

The first results of both studies refer to the ethical positions questionnaire which has once again proved to be a reliable and efficient instrument for the survey of ethical positions. The scales have a suitable internal consistence and the fundamental positions of practical philosophy - hedonism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology - could be confirmed via factor analysis.

Study I and II give evidence for the importance of all four ethical positions when it comes to justifying a decision in an economic context with utilitarianism as the most important position in both studies.

As regards content the studies try to answer the question if there is a connection between the social role someone is holding and the decision and its justification concerning an ethical problem. Thereby it was of special interest whether decisions and their justifications are socially standardized. The results of the studies gave the following answers:

- Different roles showed similar patterns of justification. The ethical differences were greater for role-behavior than role-expectation. The economic context forwarded socially standardized decisions which were to deny production transfer. Social standardizations were more influential for role-behavior.
- Different social roles led to different justifications which meant social standardization through roles. The effects were irregular concerning different roles and different ethical positions. More differentiations and thus less standardization could be stated for the condition role-expectation.
- Social roles influenced the direction of the decisions which could be interpreted as influence of social norms.
- Differences between role-behavior and role-expectation could be stated. They headed for the direction of greater influence of social norms in role-behavior.

In the light of these results the question arises whether forming ethics commissions is an adequate procedure or if it rather strengthens social standardization carried over by the social roles of commission members. Violations of relationships are the basic sources of conflict (Fiske, 1993). From this knowledge can be derived that conflicts are preassigned if social standardizations of roles influence the justification of decisions. These conflicts could be even worse if expectations are not met. Thus, the findings have an important impact on the composition and treatment of groups discussing an ethical problem, especially ethics commissions. In general, it is helpful to include the role when differences in the justifications are considered. This also means that it is possible to guide discussions better if the importance of ethical positions for

the justification of a role keeper is known. It may also be promising to lead group members to take a perspective contrary to their own (Rutherford, 2004) because group discussions can lead to a polarization as well as to stereotypes (Brauer, Judd & Jacqueline, 2001). Especially disagreements increase stereotyping (Kunda & Spencer, 2003) and can thus lead to “rigid fronts” during discussions. Role keepers should be able to express the self and connect with group members (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Davis, Conklin, Smith & Luce, 1996) without having misguided perceptions about negotiating parties or the conflict itself. (Ames, 2004). If different justifications can actually be found and ethical positions are variously weighted, respectively, then it must be assured that not only all important positions are represented (Scanlon, 1999; Schönecker, 2005) but equally considered during the ethical discussion. In this way, the influence of the composition of members could be decreased and the quality of the group’s performance and the finding of a consensual result could become easier. Finally, the equal consideration of different ethical positions meets the demands of our value pluralistic society.

As to the decisions: In the condition role-behavior (study I), the chosen context retains socially determined decisions, independently from the roles. A great majority votes against the transferring of jobs. Thereby, the ethical justifications clearly differ in their importance. Individual perspectives and opinions can only be accomplished with special roles when deciding on an ethical problem. From a rational point of view the connections between decision, justification, and social role should not be fixed but extinguished. This could be done best by a process of discussing an ethical problem based on reason. In the condition role-expectation the decisions are less standardized. The differences between role behavior and expectation give evidence for a misunderstanding between the two perspectives. People behave in a way they mean to meet the expectations linked to their roles but actually they do not meet them. Again, the uncertainty concerning the “proper behavior” and the “right decision” should be solved by the means of a discussion process which puts a stress on open-mindedness, rationality, and balanced argumentation. If decisions are not only dependent on good reasons (Janis, 1972) but also on the social roles decision makers keep, the well and woe of ethics commissions has to be reevaluated.

Further research is necessary as to the standardization of role behavior and decisions. To speak with Turner and Colomy (1993) the functional, representational, and tenable part of social roles should be determined in its influence. Not only further evidence for the mechanisms of role standardizations is needed but also the development of group procedures which are able to prevent the influence of standardizations. In addition to questionnaire studies,

field studies and experiments are desirable, which take dynamic group processes into account are desirable. Last but not least, further research should allow for different contexts because the fields in which ethical problems are discussed are ever growing. This research is only a very first step into a research about prescriptive attribution (Witte, 2001).

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Footnotes

- 1 An exception is Kohlberg (e.g. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) who put different ethical positions in hierarchical order.
- 2 The quoted literature is written in German. We do not know about comparable literature published in English. If we are mistaken we will be thankful for information.