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# Know Thyself

*An Explorative Study on Moral Identity in Decision Making*

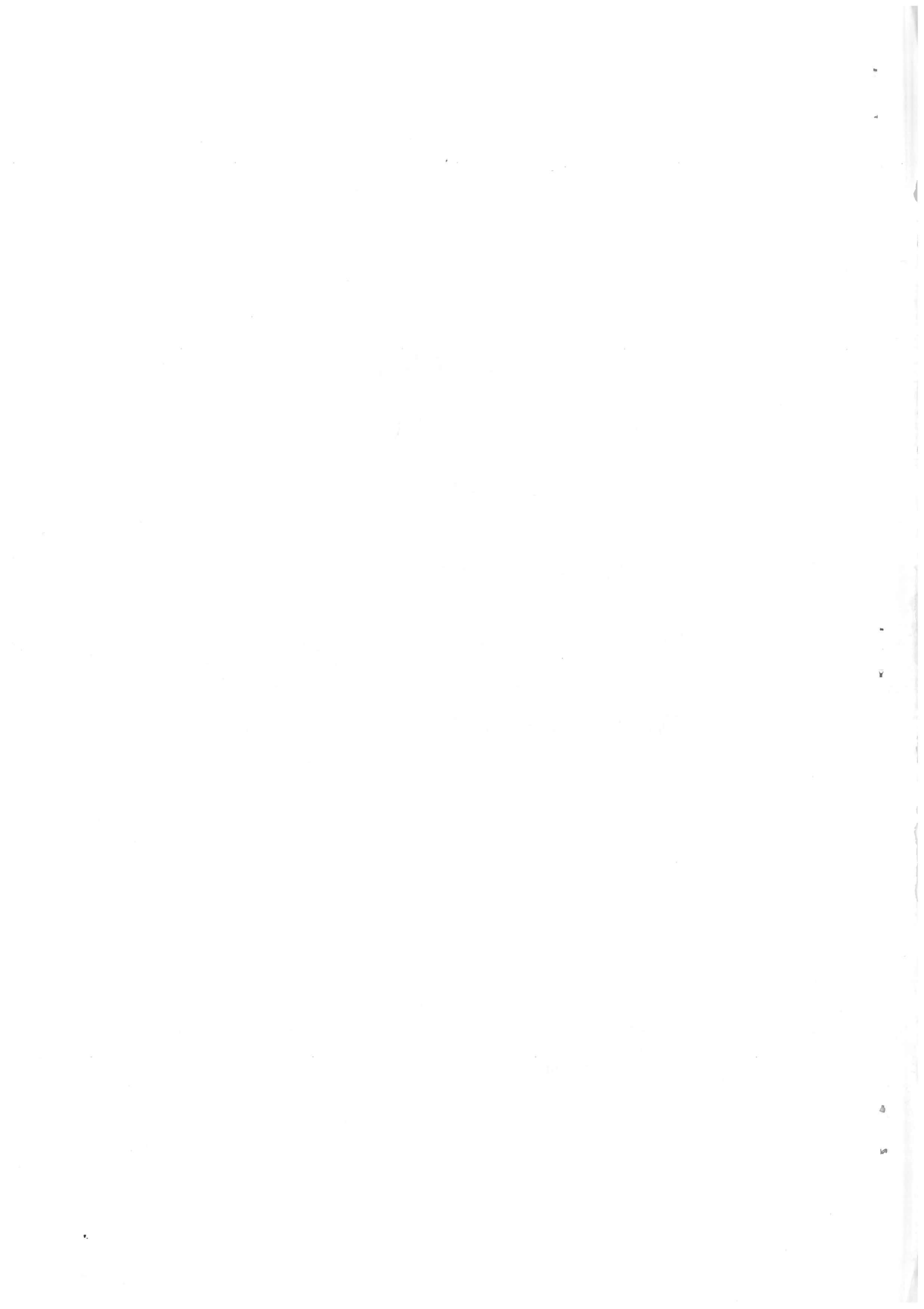
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Master Thesis in Strategy and Management

**NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS**

This thesis was written as a part of the Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration at NHH. Please note that neither the institution nor the examiners are responsible – through the approval of this thesis – for the theories and methods used, or results and conclusions drawn in this work.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a person that keeps a gratitude journal for myself every day, it is my pleasure that for once I can share this gratitude with a broader audience. This thesis is not only the result of five months of research and writing – it is a result of my journey. And I have not gone through this journey alone; this journey contains a lot of gratitude and love for others.

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With gratitude,

*Kamilla Korsnes*

*Stjørdal, Norway May 2015*



# ABSTRACT

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- Author:* Kamilla Korsnes
- Advisor:* Professor Knut Johannessen Ims
- Key words:* Moral Identity, Positive Psychology, Happiness, Well-being, Moral Behavior, Decision Making.
- Purpose:* To get a better understanding of the moral decision making process, how moral identity works in this process, and how moral decision making affects people's happiness.
- Methodology:* Eleven semi-structured interviews with decision makers in organizational contexts.
- Theoretical perspectives:* Positive Psychology in particular theory of Flourishing; Theory on Moral Identity; Philosophy including Eudaimonia, Hedonism, Virtues, and Ethics of Care; and Moral Decision Models such as Rest's Four Component Model and Mitroff's framework for holistic problem solving.
- Conclusions:* The centrality of moral identity influences whether a person makes moral decisions, and moral behavior might strengthen the centrality of moral identity. A central moral identity is related to knowing yourself. Moral behavior contributes to both short term and long term happiness for the decision maker.

*We cannot avoid using power,  
cannot escape the compulsion  
to afflict the world,  
so let us, cautious in diction and mighty in contradiction,  
love powerfully.*

**- Martin Buber -**

# SUMMARY

In this Master's Thesis I explore some of the variables that influence moral decision making, particularly moral identity and its relationship to moral behavior and happiness. Through eleven qualitative interviews with people who act as decision makers in organizational contexts, and a theoretical background of positive psychology, moral identity and moral decision making, I have gained deeper insight on how people think in relation to their decisions. The main findings are that a central moral identity is likely to result in moral decisions, and that moral behavior might strengthen the centrality of moral identity. Moral behavior can be a sustainable long term source of happiness for the decision maker, and knowing yourself is a key to a central moral identity.

# List of Contents

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
ABSTRACT .....	5
SUMMARY .....	7
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	12
1.1 Background.....	12
1.1.1 My journey .....	12
1.1.2 Business Ethics.....	13
1.1.3 Moral Decision Making .....	14
1.2 Research Questions.....	14
1.3 Structure of the Thesis .....	16
Chapter 2: Literature Study .....	17
2.1 Happiness and Positive Psychology .....	17
2.1.1 Positive Psychology .....	17
2.1.2 Happiness .....	18
2.1.3 Goals and Happiness .....	21
2.1.4 Virtue Theory .....	21
2.2 Moral Identity .....	22
2.2.1 Personality and Identity.....	23
2.2.2 Two Perspectives on Moral Identity .....	24
2.2.3 Male and female morality .....	27
2.3 Moral Decision Making.....	28
2.3.1 The Four Component Model.....	28
2.3.2 An Extended Model .....	30
2.3.3 Mitroff's Framework for Problem Solving .....	32
Chapter 3: Research Model .....	35

3.1	Introduction .....	35
3.2	The Research Model .....	36
3.3	Definitions .....	37
3.3.1	Moral Identity.....	37
3.3.2	Centrality of Moral Identity .....	37
3.3.3	Accessibility of moral identity .....	38
3.3.4	Situational Factors.....	38
3.3.5	Moral Behavior .....	38
3.3.6	Happiness .....	39
Chapter 4: Methodology.....		40
4.1	Introduction .....	40
4.2	Research Design .....	40
4.2.1	Nature of the Research: Exploratory vs. Explanatory.....	40
4.2.2	Research approach: Inductive vs. deductive .....	41
4.2.3	Research design: Qualitative.....	42
4.3	Data Gathering.....	43
4.3.1	Literature Study.....	43
4.3.2	The Interviews.....	44
4.4	Data Analysis.....	47
4.4.1	Preparing the Analysis .....	47
4.4.2	Method of Analysis: Grounded Theory Analysis .....	47
4.5	Validity .....	48
4.5.1	Internal Validity .....	48
4.5.2	Construct and Communicative Validity .....	49
4.5.3	External Validity .....	49
4.6	Reliability .....	49
4.7	Research Ethics.....	51

4.7.1	Informed Consent .....	51
4.7.2	Confidentiality and Data Handling .....	52
4.8	Weaknesses and Limitations .....	53
Chapter 5:	Findings .....	55
5.1	First Findings.....	55
5.1.1	Main findings from the first six interviews.....	55
5.1.2	Implications and Further Research – The Next Section of Interviews .....	57
5.2	Profiles.....	58
5.2.1	Sigurd .....	58
5.2.2	Unni.....	61
5.2.3	Njord.....	63
5.2.4	Vidar.....	64
5.2.5	Bodil .....	67
Chapter 6:	Analysis .....	70
6.1	Introduction .....	70
6.2	A Review of Definitions.....	70
6.2.1	What is Moral Behavior? .....	70
6.2.2	Pride and Regret .....	71
6.3	Discussion of Hypotheses.....	72
6.3.1	Hypothesis 1: Centrality of Moral Identity .....	72
6.3.2	Hypothesis 2: Situational Factors.....	73
6.3.3	Hypothesis 3: Moral Behavior .....	77
6.3.4	Hypothesis 4: Enhanced Centrality of Moral Identity?.....	79
6.3.5	Hypothesis 5: Happiness .....	80
6.4	Happiness and well-being.....	81
6.5	Virtues .....	82
6.6	Other Findings .....	84

6.4.1	Regretful Decisions: Processing and Post Mode Evaluations.....	84
6.4.2	Male and female ethics.....	84
6.4.3	Motivation.....	85
6.4.4	Njord: A deviant case? .....	86
6.4.5	Knowing yourself.....	87
Chapter 7: Conclusions .....		88
7.1	Introduction.....	88
7.1.1	Moral Decision Making .....	88
7.2	Research Questions.....	89
7.2.1	How does moral identity affect decision making? .....	89
7.2.2	How does moral behavior affect the moral identity of a person? .....	89
7.2.3	And how does moral decision making influence the decision makers' happiness? .....	89
7.3	Implications and recommendations.....	90
7.4	What does it mean to know yourself? .....	91
7.5	Future research .....	96
References .....		98
Appendix .....		103

## List of Figures

Figure 1: An extended model of moral decision making .....	30
Figure 2: Mitroff's framework for holistic problem solving .....	33
Figure 3: Research Model .....	36
Figure 4: Virtues from data .....	83

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*“The beginning is the most important part of the work”*

– Plato

## 1.1 Background

### 1.1.1 My journey

This thesis is a result of a journey – for me an academic as well as personal journey. I think it is important that I share some of my experiences and learning points from this journey because it explains my choice of research topic and motivation as a researcher. Also, because the choice of research method requires a lot of interpretation from my part – which is never fully objective even if that is what you are striving for – I think it is useful if you also get to know me a little.

At some point during my five years of Business Studies at NHH I started looking for meaning and goals beyond those of profit maximization and cost minimization. Do not get me wrong; business skills are important and I have gained a great amount of valuable knowledge at NHH, but I felt like something was missing. Additionally, I realized that besides the fact that business stimulates growth, innovation, and employment, there are also a great amount of issues related to how business is done today. We are facing resource scarcity of serious scale. We are facing problems related to global warming and changing meteorology. We are facing human rights violations and people working and living in extreme conditions. We are still facing serious gender inequality. And because of the global economy, businesses are connected to all these problems.

Furthermore, I experienced that many people around me were not particularly happy. We are living in one of the best countries in the world and are enrolled at the best business school in Norway – and still we are unhappy? After reading the first chapter of *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor (2010) I realized that the *unhappiness epidemic* at Harvard also was present at my school. Therefore, I wanted to learn more about positive psychology of both personal and professional reasons – I believe there is a tremendous value to gain from having happy employees and co-workers. It must also be mentioned that at the same time as



my “existential crisis” I was introduced for Business Ethics through the classes of Professor Knut J. Ims – and that is the main reason why I am where I am today.

### **1.1.2 Business Ethics**

When I tell people that the focus of my Master’s Thesis is Business Ethics, a response I often get is “Business *and* ethics? Is there really such a thing?” or “Business ethics? We definitely need more of that!”. To me it seems like the general view in our society is that business is the greed monster that does not take responsibility for its impact on society.

On the other hand, the topic of business ethics has become increasingly popular in the corporate world and academic world, and is often discussed in media. Concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have become a “mandatory” part of the marketing, branding and strategy of businesses, and most big corporations today have an ethics or sustainability department. This increased focus on business ethics through CSR is a step in the right direction, but I also see several problems related to the CSR concept. The first problem is: Do the companies that practice CSR really have a *green heart*, or is it just a *green mind*? Do they practice CSR because it pays off in terms of reputation to show people that you take responsibility, or because they deeply care about their own footprint on society? There is a big difference between pretending to care and actually caring – and I think there are companies in both categories. The second problem is that CSR does not say anything about how to make moral decisions and how individuals think and act in relation to ethical issues with conflicting values. CSR makes businesses more aware of some of the issues they are facing, but does not explain *how to deal with the issues* of conflicting values. The implication of this is that businesses know more about the issues they are facing, but when it comes to dealing with the problems, economical values are often prioritized over intrinsic values. Because of this, I find the concept of CSR insufficient and incomplete. We need to know more about the processes from recognizing the moral issue to the actual moral behavior.

I believe that for the business world to become green, sustainable and ethical, we need to know more about how individuals make moral decisions and how we can facilitate moral decision making in organizations. The first step towards a more ethical business world, as I see it, is to look closer at how individuals, and especially leaders, make moral decisions in real life. If we can understand the processes of moral decision making we can facilitate and help individuals in organizations to make more ethical decisions. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to *gain a deeper understanding of the moral decision making process*.

### **1.1.3 Moral Decision Making**

Moral decision making is a complex topic of research because you need to use theories from different fields of research: Psychology, philosophy, and decision making. Psychology is important for understanding how humans think and act. Philosophy is important for understanding the ethical and existential dimension of the processes and the “moral man”. Last, decision making theories are important for understanding how decisions are made. Decision making theories are also grounded in different views, some are more based on psychology and others are more systematized and rationalized (e.g. behavioral economics models). Many decision making models are criticized for being abstract models that are hard to apply for real life decisions. Thus, I find it interesting to study the processes of moral decision making in further detail by studying how people make real life decisions in organizational contexts.

These three fields of research have been heavily researched individually, but there has been less focus on uniting these three fields. However, it is not in my interest to make a thorough literature study that unites the three fields, but I will use theory and empirical data from all three fields to elucidate the moral decision making processes. I will guide you through this landscape of theory and research in Chapter 2: Literature.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The overall aim of this thesis is to get a deeper understanding of how people make decisions with regard to moral issues. Through a better understanding of people, I hope that we can be able to facilitate and motivate moral decisions and moral behavior in organizations and thus help business move towards a more sustainable and ethical future.

There are several research questions for this thesis. Due to the choice of research method some of the questions emerged as data was gathered and analyzed. The first research questions are:

- How do people make decisions with regard to conflicting values?
- What influences the processes of moral decision making?
- And how does moral decision making influence the decision makers' happiness?

Further, as data was gathered and analyzed these two questions also emerged:

- How does moral identity affect decision making?
- How does moral behavior affect the moral identity of a person?

Due to choice of research method, which does not involve observations, the first research question will be operationalized through looking at how people think about their own decision making and what their beliefs and experiences related to their decisions are.

A concept useful related to the research questions is *life-world*. Life-world is an important concept used by Ims (2006) to develop his model of personal responsibility. It may be defined as *the person's inner subjective world where a person is perceiving, interpreting and judging what is going on in the objective world around him or her. In an ethical dilemma there is typically a personal struggle between our inner subjective world and the external objective world* (Ims, 2006, ss. 240-246). This is a supplementing way of saying "How do people think and feel of their own decisions? What is going on in their life-worlds?". The term life world related to the existential dimension of a person. (Ims, Take it Personally, 2006)

The aim and objectives of this thesis will be further discussed in Chapter 3: Research Model. I chose to present the research model including hypotheses after the Literature Review because it makes it easier for the reader to follow the logic behind the model. Additionally it makes sense because that is how the model evolved in the first place, following the method of Grounded Theory (which you can read more about this in Chapter 4: Methodology).

## 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter 2 a broad range of relevant theories and empirical findings from prior research are presented. This literature review is broad because it includes theory from different fields of research – covering relevant literature from positive psychology, decision making and moral identity – which is necessary for understanding the human nature and the basics of moral decision making.

Chapter 3 presents the research model. I wanted to give this topic a separate chapter because it needs a thorough presentation that is important for the further reading of this thesis.

In Chapter 4 the methodology of is presented. Hopefully this will give you insight on how this study was conducted and the reasoning behind my decisions as a researcher.

Chapter 5 contains the findings, which are presented through five interviewee portraits and a summarized presentation of the early findings. The portraits' function is to show the key findings from each interview

In Chapter 6 the findings are further analyzed. The chapter includes some of my own reflections as well as comparison to theory and the research model.

Last, Chapter 7 sums up conclusions and future research. The findings and their implications are discussed on a higher general level.

# Chapter 2: Literature Study

*“Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony”*

– Mahatma Gandhi

## 2.1 Happiness and Positive Psychology

### 2.1.1 Positive Psychology

According to Seligman et al. (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004), psychology initially had three main objectives: 1) to cure mental illness, 2) to make relatively untroubled people happier, and 3) to study genius and high talent. After World War II psychology research was largely devoted to repairing weaknesses and understanding suffering (called pathology), resulting in neglecting the two last objectives (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). The pathology focus has made us able to make troubled people less miserable, but absence of mental illnesses and suffering is not necessarily enough to make people individuals flourish – happiness is more than the absence of unhappiness (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). This one-sided focus on what is wrong with people, rather than what is right, started the movement of positive psychology.

Positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future) and flow and happiness (in the present) (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that lead individuals towards better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000).

Psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue – and nurturing what is best (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000).

*“The ultimate goal of positive psychology is to make people happier by understanding and building positive emotions, gratification and meaning”*

- (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004, s. 1379) –

### **2.1.2 Happiness**

From the beginnings of intellectual history there has been considerable debate of what defines happiness and what constitutes “the good life”. The current research on happiness has derived from two general perspectives first debated by ancient philosophers; the hedonic approach which focuses on pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, and the eudaimonic approach which focuses on fulfilling or realizing one’s true nature (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

#### ***The Hedonic View***

In the fourth century B.C. the Greek philosopher Aristippus taught that the goal of life is to experience the maximum amount of pleasure, and that happiness is the totality of one’s hedonic moments (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Aristippus’ early philosophical hedonism has been followed by many others, like Hobbes who argues that happiness derives from successfully pursuing out human appetites, and DeSade who argues that pursuit of sensation and pleasure is the ultimate goal in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Further, utilitarians such as Bentham argued that through individuals’ pursuit of maximizing pleasure and self-interest the good society is build. In current times, the psychologist and researcher Daniel Kahneman has developed this utilitarianism and hedonic view further, and shows evidence about how people calculate utilities, maximize the density of reward, and optimize inputs associated with pleasure versus displeasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The early hedonic philosophers tended to focus mostly on bodily pleasures, but the hedonic view today is broader and includes preferences and pleasures of the mind as well as the body (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is important to remember that in the hedonic view, happiness is not reducible to physical hedonism – it can be derived from attainment of goals or valued outcomes in varied realms.

#### ***The Eudaimonic View***

Aristotle considered the hedonic happiness to be a vulgar ideal, simplifying humans to slavish followers of desires (Ryan & Deci, 2001). He posited, instead, that true happiness is found in the expression of virtue – in doing what is worth doing. The eudaimonic view focuses on meaning and self-realization, and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Eudaimonia occurs when people’s life activities are

most congruent with deeply held values and they are fully engaged in the activity, and under such circumstances people would feel intensely alive and authentic (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Eudaimonic theories emphasize that not all desires or outcomes that a person might value would yield well-being when achieved (Ryan & Deci, 2001). A desire can be pleasure producing but still not good for people and will not produce wellness. Additionally, the eudaimonic philosophers argue that there are some desires, goals and actions which will not produce pleasure but still contribute to one's well-being. Thus, the pleasure focused hedonistic view is not sufficient for explaining long term happiness and well-being.

#### ***Authentic Happiness Theory – The Full Life***

Current research indicates that happiness is best conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon which includes aspects of both the hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of happiness and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Seligman et al. (2004) propose a more holistic approach, and identify three constituents of happiness: 1) pleasure (or positive emotion), 2) engagement, and 3) meaning.

The first route to greater happiness is hedonic, increasing *positive emotions*. Within limits, we can increase our positive emotions about the past (e.g. by cultivating gratitude and forgiveness), our positive emotions about the present (e.g. by savoring and mindfulness) and our positive emotions about the future (e.g. by building hope and optimism) (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Seligman et al. (2004) argues that it is possible (and worthwhile) to increase the amount of positive emotion in our lives, but relying on positive emotions has limits because we can boost our hedonics only so high. This underlines the importance of a broader approach to happiness.

A second route to happiness, according to Seligman et al. (2004) is the pursuit of '*gratification*' or *engagement*. The key characteristic of a gratification is that it *engages* us fully – it absorbs us (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). There are shortcuts to pleasures (e.g. eating ice cream, masturbating, or using drugs), but there are no shortcuts to gratification. The pursuit of gratifications require us to must involve ourselves fully and to draw on character strengths such as creativity, social intelligence, sense of humor, perseverance, and an appreciation of beauty and excellence (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Examples of activities that may bring gratification is engaging in a good conversation, reading a book, playing the guitar or accomplishing a difficult task at work. Although gratifications are

activities that may be enjoyable, they are not necessarily accompanied by positive emotions – sometimes it can even be unpleasant.

Finding flow in gratifications need not involve anything larger than the self. Although the pursuit of gratifications involves deploying our strengths, a third route to happiness comes from using these strengths to belong to and in the service of something larger than ourselves; something such as knowledge, goodness, family, community, politics, justice or a higher spiritual power (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, A balanced psychology and a full life, 2004). This is the route of *meaning*, which satisfies a longing for purpose in life.

Peterson et al. (2005) demonstrate that people differ in their tendency to pursue these three different routes to happiness. The tendency to pursue happiness by boosting positive emotion is called ‘the pleasant life’; the tendency to pursue happiness via the gratifications is called ‘the good life’; the tendency to pursue happiness via using our strengths towards something larger than ourselves is called ‘the meaningful life’, and using all three routes to happiness is called “the full life” (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Peterson et al. (2005) found that people who lead the full life have much the greater life satisfaction.

#### ***PERMA – Theory of Flourishing***

Seligman’s Authentic Happiness Theory was further developed into the Theory of Flourishing. First of all, Seligman found it necessary to change the target of positive psychology from happiness or life satisfaction to *well-being* or *flourishing*. He thought that positive emotions, engagement and meaning did not exhaust what people valued for their own sake (Seligman M. , 2010). Seligman (2010) concluded there are five elements of well-being, resulting in the term PERMA: First and second are *Positive emotions* and *Engagement*, as in Authentic Happiness Theory. The third is *positive Relationships*, which can be explained by the fact that people are motivated to seek out and maintain positive relationships even when it brings none of the other elements. The fourth element is *Meaning*, which is belonging to and serving something you think is bigger than you are. And the last one is *Accomplishment*; many people are motivated to achieve, to have mastery, to have competence, even if it brings no positive emotion, no engagement, no relationships, and no meaning (Seligman M. , 2010).



### **2.1.3 Goals and Happiness**

Research has found that personal goals are related to long-term levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Emmons, 2003). For many people the primary goal *is* to be happy. Yet, research indicates that happiness is most often a by-product of participating in worthwhile projects and activities that do not have as their primary focus the attainment of happiness (Emmons, 2003). Some argue that the construct of “meaning” has no meaning outside of a person’s goals and purposes. Goals are signals that orient a person to what is valuable, meaningful, and purposeful (Emmons, 2003).

The findings on goal content and well being indicate that when it comes to the positive life, not all goals are of the same importance. Certain categories of goals tend to generate higher levels of well-being than other types of goals. Intimacy, generativity, and spirituality are intrinsically rewarding domains of goal activity that makes lives meaningful and purposeful, particularly compared to power strivings or strivings for self-sufficiency (Emmons, 2003).

### **2.1.4 Virtue Theory**

The topic of virtues was first discussed by the first Greek philosophers when they were trying to answer the question of “what is the good of a person?”. In Platonic tradition, virtue is to be the best version of one self (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The Platonic virtues are *courage*, *temperance*, and *wisdom*. When these are in harmony, the fourth virtue of *justice* arises. Aristotle connects virtues to happiness (eudaimonia) and stated that happiness is “activity in accordance with virtues”. The four virtues from Plato are called the cardinal virtues. In addition to the cardinal virtues, Judaism and Christianity brought forward the virtues of faith, hope and charity – which are referred to as the theological virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The research on positive psychology has resulted in yet another set of virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six categories of virtues that were surprisingly consistent across cultures; courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom. I will use this latest contribution to virtue theory when analyzing virtues later in this thesis.

#### ***Virtues and Goal Striving***

Virtues are essential person characteristics that can differentiate successful from unsuccessful goal strivers (Emmons, 2003). When it comes to goal striving, three virtues are considered especially important: 1) prudence, 2) patience, and 3) perseverance (Emmons, 2003).

*Prudence* is normally conceived as an intellectual virtue. Jeffries (Jeffries, 1998, s. 154) defined it as “the use of reason to correctly discern that which helps and that which hinders realizing the good”. When applied to goal striving, prudence is foresight, future-mindedness and the reasoned pursuit of long-term goals. Also, prudence invokes a concern with identity, self-continuity, and personal integration as one projects oneself into the future (Emmons, 2003). *Patience* is “the ability to dwell gladly in the present moment” (Roberts, 1984, s. 53), when one would rather do something else. Patience is not just an absence of striving, it enables people to be attentively responsive to others, to be responsive to opportunities for goal attainment (Emmons, 2003). Patience also includes suffering with calmness and composure. Although patience is about the present, perseverance focuses on the future. *Perseverance* is the ability to keep commitments, to be steadfast, to endure despite obstacles, to make sacrifices, and to resist temptations to give up (Brickman, 1987).

## 2.2 Moral Identity

Moral identity is individuals’ knowledge about themselves as moral actors (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). Bergman (2002) defines moral identity as “a specific kind of identity that revolves around the moral aspects of one’s self” (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). This is critical for moral decision making, because self-identity consists of the most accessible and elaborate knowledge structures individuals hold, and thus imposes a strong influence on how individuals regulate thought and control behavior (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). The self-regulatory functions provided by moral identity are critical to understanding the moral decision making process. A person can have a high moral complexity and meta-cognitive ability, but might come up with ways to justify moral disengagement if such rich processing is not guided by self-standards. (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011)

In addition to this, Hannah et al. propose that the content of moral identity consists of *self-knowledge components* (e.g. “What do I stand for?” or “What are my core beliefs?”) and *evaluative components* (e.g. “Am I a moral person?” or “How well do I stand up for my beliefs?”) and their associated sets of goals, affect, self-regulatory plans, etc. Moral identity can thus be defined and measured as more or less complex based on how rich and differentiated it is as structures across individuals’ self-identities (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011).

### 2.2.1 Personality and Identity

#### *Personality: The big five*

McAdams (2009) explains that through natural selection human beings have been designed to detect differences in others with respect to such qualities as how sociable and dominant a person is (extraversion), the extent to which a person is caring and cooperative (agreeableness), a person's characteristic level of dependability and industriousness (conscientiousness), levels of emotional stability and dysfunction in other people (neuroticism), and the extent to which a person may be cognitively flexible or rigid in facing a range of adaptive problems (openness to experience). The Big Five implicitly encodes those broad and pervasive individual differences in personality that have tended to make a big difference in adaptation to group life over the course of human evolution, as they continue to make difference today (McAdams, 2009).

The five basic traits identified by personality psychologists carry considerable moral meaning. Out of these five traits, especially conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience are closely associated with moral reasoning and thought (McAdams, 2009). *Agreeableness* speaks to caring and altruistic tendencies, and often implies being more sensitive to the suffering of others, and more positively disposed toward fairness, reciprocity and loyalty. *Conscientiousness* encompasses qualities such as honesty and dependability in interpersonal relationships. People with high *openness to experience* tend to be highly imaginative, reflective, intellectual, and broadminded. Most generally, conscientiousness and agreeableness tend to predict pro-social behavior whereas openness to experience tends to predict principled moral reasoning (McAdams, 2009).

#### *Another Five Point Framework: Five Levels of Personality*

McAdams (2009) developed a five-point framework for an integrative science of personality. They described personality as 1) an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of 2) *dispositional traits*, 3) *characteristic adaptations*, and 4) *self-defining life narratives*, complexly and differentially situated in 5) culture and social context (McAdams, 2009).

Characteristic adaptations have typically been the constructs of choice for classic motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental theories of personality. Among these characteristic adaptations that are most instrumental in shaping morality are *personal goals and projects*. Goals and projects are always about the future – the imagined ends of tomorrow

that guide behavior today. Whereas dispositional traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness describe cross-situational and longitudinal continuities in broad patterns of behavior, thought, and feeling, the more circumscribed constructs *moral goals* speak to the contextualized details of moral personality (McAdams, 2009).

In addition to dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, another important element of personality is *life narratives*. Life narratives are the internalized and evolving stories people live by, which provide their lives with some measure of unity, purpose and meaning (McAdams, 2009). What is my life really about? What would it mean to live a good life? This philosophical inclination requires a narrative frame for self-construction. MacIntyre (1981, in McAdams, 2009) argues that all life stories speak from a moral perspective; either explicitly or implicitly, the narrator takes a moral stand vis-à-vis the self and society, draws on moral understanding which frame the narrative, and justifies or condemns his or her own identity tale in moral terms (McAdams, 2009).

### ***2.2.2 Two Perspectives on Moral Identity***

The research on moral identity is based on two major perspectives: the character perspective and the social-cognitive perspective (Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008).

#### ***The Character Perspective***

*The character perspective* is based on Blasi's (1983, 2004) "Self Model", which has three major components. First, the model posits that people not only decide what is "right" and "wrong" in a situation by making moral judgment, but they also make a judgment of responsibility, which means assessing whether they are responsible for acting on their judgment. Second, the criteria for making moral judgments arise from a person's moral identity, which reflects individual differences in the degree to which being moral is a central or essential characteristic of the sense of self (Blasi, 2004). The third component of the Self Model is the human tendency to strive for self-consistency. This tendency provides the motivational impetus for moral action, so that a person whose self-definition is centered on moral concerns will feel compelled to act in a manner that is consistent with his or her moral self-construal (Blasi, 1983).

Blasi (2004) later expanded the model by proposing three virtues as essential for someone to have moral identity: willpower, integrity, and moral desire. Two of these requirements – willpower and integrity – have little to do with morality per se (i.e., they are morally neutral).

Instead, they relate to the motivational underpinnings of moral identity. Willpower is defined as the capacity for self-control, and such it is necessary to avoid temptation and consistently guide the individual according to moral aims. Integrity is defined as an individual's concern for the unity of his or her sense of self, and as such it directs the individual toward behaviors that are consistent with the possession of a moral identity. The last component, moral desire, relates to the essence of moral character. According to Blasi (2004), moral desire reflects the intensity with which one yearns for first-order moral goals and ideals like kindness, honesty, fairness, truthfulness, and compassion. In other words, the strength of one's moral desires determines their level of conviction in pursuing moral outcomes vis-à-vis other possible goals (e.g. power, politeness, pleasure, and creativity). Importantly, Blasi (2004) conceives moral desire as a product of volition; that is, a conscious reflection on the desire to act in accordance with the moral self.

The character perspective has some limitations. First, it appears to be germane to a narrow set of moral behaviors that are undertaken after thoughtful consideration – limiting the study of moral behavior to acts that result from deliberate and conscious processes excludes the possibility that most of what constitutes the practice of “everyday morality” may be tacit, automatic and driven by moral heuristics rather than calculative reasoning (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Second, the character perspective ignores the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of personal identities. It narrowly applies to individuals for whom moral identity occupies the most central location within the self and does not say much about *when* and under *what situations* moral identity will be (or not be) experienced as part of the sense of self relative to other identities (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

### ***The Social-Cognitive Perspective***

*The social-cognitive perspective* conceptualizes moral identity as an organized cognitive representation, or schema, of moral values, goals, traits, and behavioral scripts. Aquino and Reed (2002) argues that moral identity should act as a powerful regulator of moral action when moral identity is not readily accessible and/or its activation potential is constrained, then moral identity should be less potent regulator of behavior. Building from this basic social-cognitive model of moral functioning, Aquino and Reed (2002) defined moral identity as a self-schema organized around a set of moral *trait associations*. They argue that moral identity has a private as well as public aspect, meaning that the cognitive representation of the moral self that resides in memory is often projected symbolically to others through the person's

actions in the world. They labeled the private aspect of moral identity *internalization* and the public aspect *symbolization*. Aquino and Reed's (Aquino & Reed, 2002) conceptualization also shares two notable commonalities with the character perspective: 1) it assumes that a person's moral identity can occupy different levels of importance within a person's overall self-definition, and 2) it assumes that the motivational potency of moral identity arises from the human desire for self-consistency. However, an important difference is that the social-cognitive models posit that situational cues may influence social information processing by activating or deactivating knowledge structures, including the moral self concept. People must balance multiple and sometimes competing identities, of which only a subset – known as the *working self-concept* – is activated at any given time, the regulatory influence of moral identity is likely to wax and wane as it becomes more rather than less available for processing and reacting to information in any given situation. This way, the social-cognitive perspective helps explain both the situational variability and the intra-individual stability of moral behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Shao et al. (Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008) argue that if we want to minimize unethical behavior in business organizations, we must first remove or weaken influences that motivate employees to act unethically, or, find ways to activate or reinforce those aspects of the self around which moral concerns and virtues are organized.

### *The Working Self*

The social-cognitive view of the self-concept as a network of identity schemas recognizes that people balance multiple identities and that only a few can be held in consciousness at any given time (Aquino, Felps, Freeman, Lim, & Reed, 2009). Aquino et al. (2009) argues that the influence of any identity that comprises the working self-concept is a function of how accessible that identity is in a given situation. People whose moral identity occupies greater centrality within the self-concept should perceive that being a moral person is more self-definitional relative to other identities (Blasi, 2004). Furthermore, the moral self-schema of someone for whom moral identity is highly central should be activated more strongly and more frequently than the other self-schemas comprising his or her net-work of self-identities (Aquino et al., 2009). Aquino et al. (2009) propose that the greater the centrality of moral identity, the higher its *activation potential* and the stronger its ability to affect information processing and moral behavior. Activation potential refers to the extent to which a knowledge structure tends to be readily accessible for processing and acting on information (Higgins &

Brendl, 1995). Aquino et al.'s (2009) findings support that the accessibility of moral identity within the working self-concept should determine the extent to which it influences moral outcomes.

Reed and Levy (2007) found that moral identity is more likely to regulate judgments when it is relatively more top of mind (i.e., temporarily salient) and/or when it is relatively more important to a person's self-concept (i.e., self-important). Aquino et al. (2009) support this, suggesting that moral intentions and behaviors are a joint function of (a) the centrality of moral identity to an individual's self-conception and (b) the extent to which situational cues temporarily affect the current accessibility of the moral self-schema within the working self. Furthermore, they (Reed & Levy, 2007) argue that by specifying the set of circumstances under which a person's moral identity is most likely to be accessible, as well as the set of circumstances under which aspects of identity with inherently oppositional values and goals will be accessible, we can apply the social-cognitive framework to derive specific predictions about the interplay between situational factors and the centrality of moral identity.

### ***2.2.3 Male and female morality***

Gilligan (Gilligan, 1982) criticizes Kohlberg's six stages of moral development for not considering gender differences, and thus explaining the moral development of males rather than females. According to Kohlberg's six stages one can "measure" a person's moral maturation to one of the six stages by looking at their moral orientation. However, Gilligan's finding (1982) is that females' moral orientation is different from males' moral orientation, which makes Kohlberg's model incomplete and insufficient for evaluating moral maturation. According to Gilligan (Gilligan, 1982) women interpret the questions and moral dilemmas differently because of their orientation towards themselves and the world.

Gilligan (1982) argues that women see themselves and the world differently than men do: they see a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules. From this Gilligan proposed the theory of Ethics of Care, where she argues that women's morality is focused on care, love and relationships which differs from men's morality that is more focused on logic of justice and fairness (Gilligan, 1982).

*“She locates herself in relation to the world, describes herself through actions that bring her into connection with others, elaborating ties through her ability to help. To her, responsibility signifies response, an extension rather than a limitation of action.”* (Gilligan, 1982).

Other studies (e.g. (Haviv & Leman, 2002)) find no evidence of Gilligan’s gender differences when it comes to moral orientation. However, Haviv and Leman (2002) found a significant interaction between gender role and type of dilemma. Gender *role* may serve as a better predictor of moral orientation than gender alone, which indicates that Gilligan’s notion of moral orientation may be embedded in life experience rather than to any particular gender group in itself (Haviv & Leman, 2002). Although Gilligan’s Ethic of Care have few supporting empirical findings, this possible difference between female and male ethics is still relevant for further research. Additionally, Haviv and Leman’s (2002) findings on the gender role and morality might be important in the research of moral decision making.

## **2.3 Moral Decision Making**

Decision making has been researched for decades, and there are many different theories and models for decision making developed over the years of research. Classical decision models are for example Ajzen & Fishbein’s (1975) “Theory of reasoned action”; Herbert Simon’s “Rational Choice Model”; Allison & Zelikow’s (1999) “Government Politics Model” and “Organizational Process Model”, and Cohen, March & Olsen’s (1972) “Garbage Can Model”. These are all interesting and important decision models, but for the scope of this study and for not including too much in this literature review I choose to not describe these models in detail and rather focus on the newest contributions in the field of moral decision making models.

### **2.3.1 The Four Component Model**

Rest et al. (1999) argues that ethical action is the product of four psychological subprocesses, which they developed into the well known four component model for moral decision making: 1) Moral sensitivity, 2) Moral judgment, 3) Moral motivation, and 4) moral character. These four components are not general personality traits but internal processes that must be activated for external moral behavior to occur (Moores & Chang, 2006). They are not part of a sequential decision-making model. Rather, they influence each other via feedforward and feedback loops, with cognition, affect, and behavior all playing a role (Moores & Chang, 2006).



*Moral sensitivity* is the ability to interpret the situation as moral, the recognition that an ethical problem exists (Johnson, 2012). This includes interpreting how an act will affect the welfare of self or others and having empathy for those involved (Moore & Chang, 2006), as well as identifying possible courses of action and determining the consequences of each potential strategy (Johnson, 2012). Moral sensitivity is a key to transformational ethics, since we cannot solve a problem without knowing that one is present (Johnson, 2012). Empathy and perspective skills are essential to identifying and exploring moral issues, and the lack of thereof can result in failure to understand the causal links of the issue (Moore & Chang, 2006).

*Moral judgment* is judging which possible course of action, identified through moral sensitivity, is most justified (Moore & Chang, 2006). This means deciding what is right or wrong in the specific situation, based on some moral ideal (Johnson, 2012). Kohlberg (1976, 1984) views moral judgment as a maturation process, where a person's ability to process and reason moral issues will develop with age through six stages. The classic Kohlbergian view has met some criticism related to gender differences (Gilligan, 1982), and role differences (Haviv & Leman, 2002), and there is little evidence to support the existence of higher-level moral reasoning (Moore & Chang, 2006).

The third component, *moral motivation*, is the ability to prioritize moral concerns over competing issues and deciding what one intends to do (Moore & Chang, 2006). Moral values often conflict with other important values like job security, career advancement, social acceptance, and wealth – and moral behavior will only occur if moral considerations are seen as more important than other issues (Johnson, 2012).

The fourth and final stage of moral action – executing the plan – requires character. *Moral character* is the ability to transform intention into actual behavior (Moore & Chang, 2006). Moral agents must be persistent to overcome obstacles such as active opposition, coping with fatigue, resisting distractions, and developing strategies for reaching their goals (Johnson, 2012). At this stage, traits as ego-strength, self-regulation, and self-efficacy may play an important role (Moore & Chang, 2006), in addition to persistence and competence (Johnson, 2012).

### 2.3.2 An Extended Model

Rest et al.'s (1999) four component model has been an important contribution to the theory on moral decision making, yet there are several aspects of moral decision making that is not included in this model. Hannah et al. (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011) propose an addition to the original four component model by including more moral capacities needed to process a moral challenge from recognition to action. In addition to Rest et al.'s (1999) four components – moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral action/character – they include capacities that explain the variance across individuals enabling someone to effectively execute the steps or actions related to these four processes. These capacities are grouped in moral maturation capacities (moral complexity, meta-cognitive ability, and moral identity) and moral conation capacities (moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage). Hannah et al. (2011) define *moral maturation* as the capacity to elaborate and effectively attend to, store, retrieve, process, and make meaning of morally relevant information. *Moral conation* is defined as the capacity to generate responsibility and motivation to take moral action in the face of adversity and persevere through challenges (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011).

The upper half of the figure (the capacities) can serve to explain why individuals are more or less inclined and able to effectively execute those four processes.

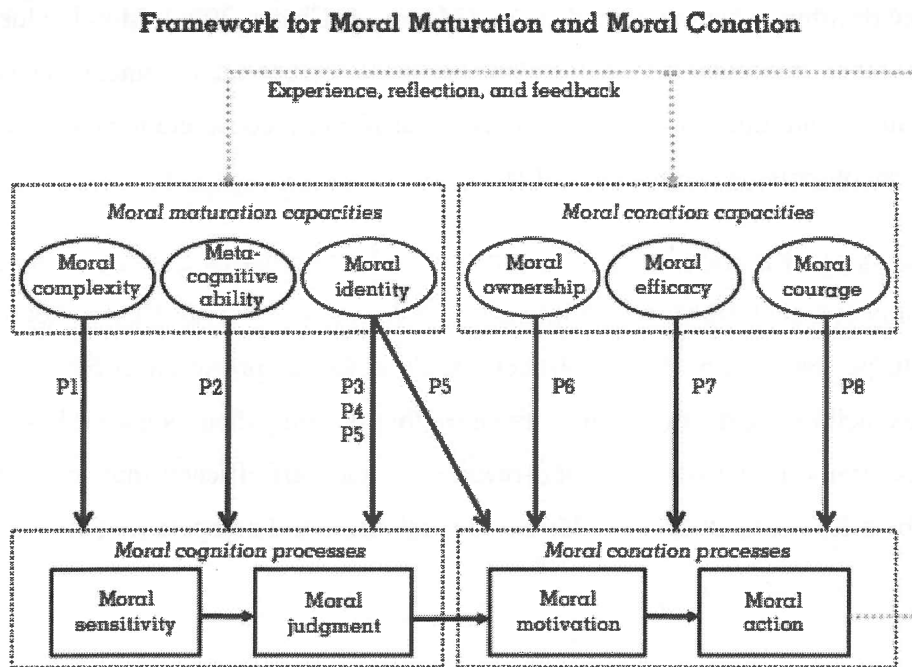


Figure 1: An extended model of moral decision making (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011)

The six capacities:

- 1) *Moral complexity*: Moral complexity is critical because the distinctive dimensions individuals use to organize and make meaning of the world strongly influence how they make decisions and behave within a specific domain. More cognitively complex individuals process information more thoroughly because they have more categories to discriminate among information received in their environment and are more able to see commonalities and connections among those categories. Greater moral complexity provides a larger and more developed set of prototypes with which to process more information, which includes greater ability to understand the various dimensions of moral dilemmas and greater ability to create imaginative solutions. (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011)
- 2) *Metacognitive ability*: A high moral complexity is of no use if the individual is not able to process the complex information. This is where the metacognitive ability is important – it is the capacity to deeply process complex moral knowledge. Metacognitive ability is composed of monitoring and regulation of cognitive processes, thus serving both self-referential and executive control functions. Metacognitive ability differs from cognitive ability (intelligence) in the way that cognitive ability is the general capacity to reason and solve problems, whereas metacognitive ability is the ability to regulate and control cognition as these reasoning processes unfold. Complex moral dilemmas require the capacity to select from, access, and modify moral knowledge and to apply elaborative reasoning to the specific moral dilemma being confronted in order for an individual to achieve a sense of logical coherence.
- 3) *Moral identity*: Moral identity is individuals' knowledge about themselves as moral actors. This is critical for moral decision making, because self-identity consists of the most accessible and elaborate knowledge structures individuals hold, and thus imposes a strong influence on how individuals regulate thought and control behavior. The self-regulatory functions provided by moral identity are critical to understanding the moral decision making process. A person can have a high moral complexity and metacognitive ability, but might come up with ways to justify moral disengagement if such rich processing is not guided by self-standards. (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011)
- 4) *Moral ownership*: Hannah et al. (2011) define moral ownership as “the extent to which members feel a sense of psychological responsibility over the ethical nature of

their own actions, those of others around them, their organization, or another collective”, and suggest that moral ownership represents individuals’ sense of responsibility for and impetus to stand up and act to influence morality in their current environment.

- 5) *Moral efficacy*: Hannah et al. (2011) define moral efficacy as “*an individual’s belief in his or her capabilities to organize and mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, means, and courses of action needed to attain moral performance, within a given moral domain, while persisting in the face of moral adversity*”. The moral efficacy consists of two aspects; a person’s internal (self-efficacy) and external (means efficacy). This means that for individuals to act ethically they must believe they not only have the personal capability to address a specific moral issue but that supporting means are available to allow them to act successfully. (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011)
- 6) *Moral courage*: Hannah et al. (2011, p. 676) define moral courage in the workplace as “*1) a malleable character strength, 2) provides the requisite conation needed to commit to personal moral principles, 3) under conditions where the actor is aware of the objective danger involved in supporting those principles, 4) that enables the willing endurance of that danger, 5) in order to act ethically or resist pressure to act unethically as required to maintain those principles*”. Individuals may feel responsibility to act (i.e. moral ownership) and believe that they have the capacity to do so (i.e. moral efficacy), yet still have insufficient courage to overcome the threat they face and to act (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011).

Both moral efficacy and moral courage is contextualized and domain specific, varying across identity subdimensions.

A weakness of the framework is that it does not consider/include contextual factors, such as organizational context and culture, and leadership. This should be included in future research.

### **2.3.3 Mitroff’s Framework for Problem Solving**

Although this is not considered a decision making model, Mitroff’s framework for problem solving can be a helpful tool in any decision process or for analyzing decisions, problems and consequences. The framework illustrates a systematic approach to problem solving by providing a deeper understanding of the problem situation and consequences, where the aim is to *find the right solution to the right problem* (J. Ims & Zsolnai). Mitroff (1998) argues that a common issue related to problem solving is that we often solve the wrong problems, and he

considers it preferable to find an approximate solution to the right problem rather than clever solution to the wrong problem (J. Ims & Zsolnai). The aim of the framework is to help problem solvers to gain a deeper understanding of the problem and to avoid this problem of solving the wrong problems. In the framework Mitroff distinguishes between four perspectives on a problem; 1) technical, 2) social, 3) existential, and 4) systematic.

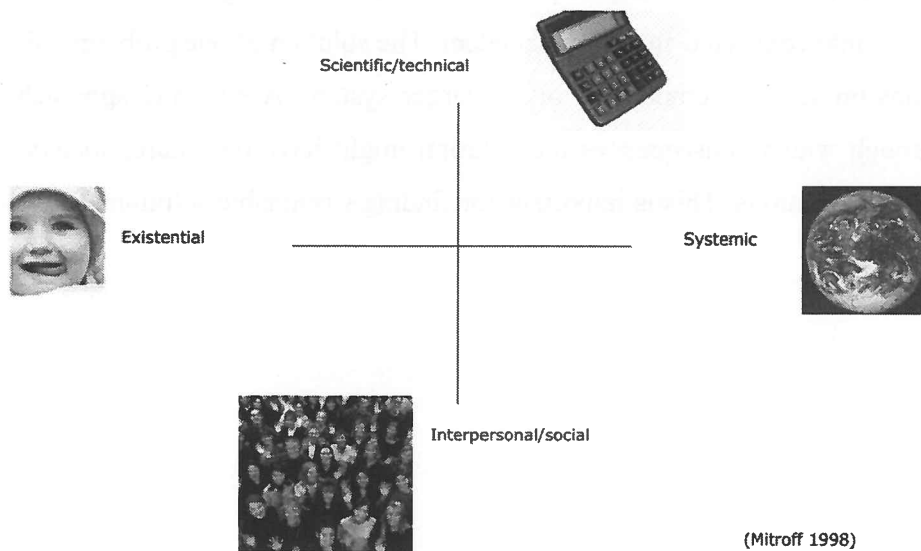


Figure 2: Mitroff's Framework for Holistic Problem Solving (Mitroff, 1998)

The *technical or scientific dimension* is seeing the problem from the perspective of tools that are developed within the field of technology, science and business. This often includes theories, models, frameworks, formulas, hypotheses and calculations. Mitroff argues that humans today are more inclined to use the technical approach to problem solving rather than the other dimensions, and thus often ignoring important social, existential and systemic dimensions of a problem.

The *social dimension* involves seeing the problem in the light of social contexts. Problems are usually part of a larger context and social issues are often related to the problem. A way to use this approach to a problem is by asking questions like: How will this influence families? How will this affect the social environment in the organization? What would others think of this decision? And what would happen if everyone made the same decision as me?

Many problems have an *existential dimension* as well. When there are people involved it is important to consider implications related to meaning, values and human dignity. To enlighten this dimension one may ask questions like: How will this decision affect other

people's self esteem and dignity? Or what they find meaningful in life? Mitroff emphasizes the importance of not treating human beings as objects – we are all creatures with emotions and dignity. Ethical, emotional and existential impulses are the strongest impulses we have, thus we should not underestimate the importance of this dimension of problems.

Last, the systemic perspective is about seeing the problem in relation to the greater whole. On this planet, everything is interconnected and interdependent. The solution of one problem will often have implications on several components of the larger system. A systemic approach involves thinking through which consequences the solution might have on nature, society, planet earth, and future generations. This is important for finding sustainable solutions to the problems.

# Chapter 3: Research Model

## 3.1 Introduction

A research model with hypotheses is more common for a quantitative study than for a qualitative and explorative study like this one. However, I find it beneficial to present a research model for several reasons. First, this study does not follow a specific research approach and strategy in its “pure” form – it has components from different strategies and approaches, which also means that following the typical norm does not apply to this study. As I will discuss further in the methodology chapter, research approaches and strategies should not be seen as strict systems, but rather an iterative process that shifts focus back and forth between the different components of the design. Also, this is supported by the use of Grounded Theory Method, where developing hypotheses is a part of the explorative research design. Second, this field of moral decision making can be overwhelming with theories and findings from different areas of research and the decision making processes are complex. A research model makes it easier to present what this study is about. Third, and most important, I think the model adds structure both for the researcher and the reader of this study. A visual model is easier to grasp than pages of words trying to explain the same thing.

It must be noted that despite these hypotheses, my aim is not to measure the relationship between the variables in a quantitative way. This means that there will be no clear measuring at all, since a qualitative study cannot provide sufficient data which makes it possible to generalize the findings. My aim is to *explore the relationship between the variables* to see what might explain parts of the moral decision making processes. Also, I think that some of the most clever and interesting findings are not necessarily found through measuring variables in numbers, but rather through explorative authentic meetings.

## 3.2 The Research Model

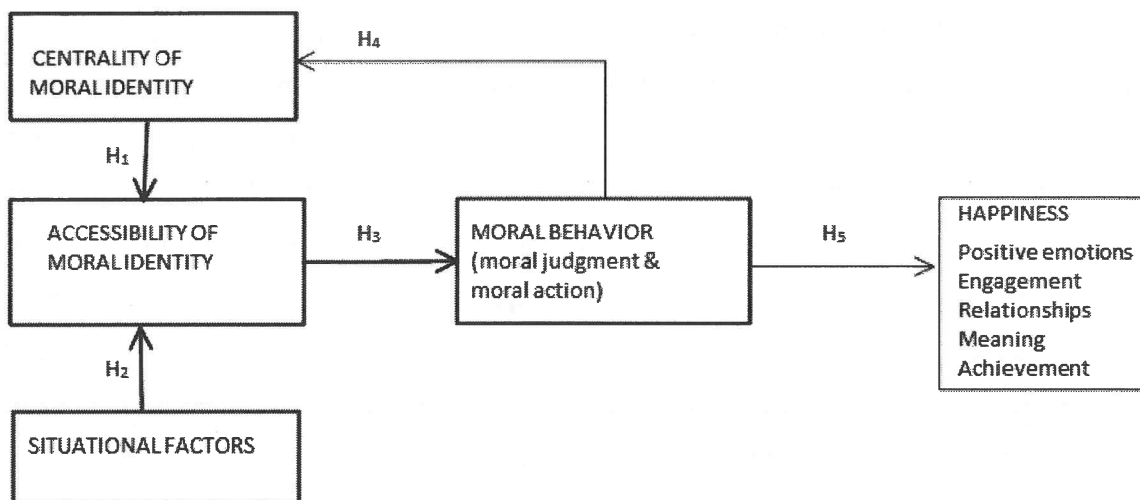


Figure 3: Research Model

H1: High centrality of moral identity will increase the accessibility of moral identity, whereas low centrality of moral identity will decrease the accessibility of moral identity.

H2: Situational factors can either increase or decrease the accessibility of the moral identity in the working self. In other words: situational factors can make the moral identity more or less salient.

H3: High accessibility of the moral identity (moral identity as a part of working self) leads to more moral behavior, whereas low accessibility of moral identity (and moral identity not a part of the working self) leads to less moral behavior.

H4: Moral behavior strengthens the centrality of moral identity, whereas immoral behavior weakens the centrality of your moral identity.

H5: Moral behavior leads to long term happiness.

Hypothesis 1-3 are based on the theory and findings presented in the literature chapter. Hypothesis 4 and 5 are based on my own assumptions and supported by findings from the pilot study, which will be presented in further detail in Chapter 5: Findings.



## 3.3 Definitions

### 3.3.1 Moral Identity

A moral identity is a specific kind of identity that revolves around the moral aspects of one's self (Bergman, 2002). A moral identity acts as a *self-regulatory* mechanism that sets parameters for individual behavior and motivates specific action that is moral (e.g. Blasi 1983). The *motivating force* of a moral identity is explained by the consistency principle, which states that an identity creates a need for the individual to be true to himself or herself and, therefore, the need to act consistently with his or her identity (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). Moral identity is more likely to *regulate judgments* when it is relatively more top of mind (i.e., temporarily salient) and/or when it is relatively more important to a person's self-concept (i.e., self-important) (Reed & Levy, 2007).

### 3.3.2 Centrality of Moral Identity

Centrality of moral identity refers to *how important the moral identity is* to the individual's identity. In other words; some people have a particularly strong moral identity, and for some people the moral identity is less important to their overall identity as a human being. The centrality of moral identity can explain why some people are very idealistic when it comes to morality – some people will devote their lives to do good for other people. For other people, other parts of their identity are more important which places the moral identity more in the background. It must be noted that despite the fact that for some people the moral identity is in the background, it is assumed that all human beings have some kind of moral identity – that is what makes us human.

People whose moral identity occupies greater centrality within the self-concept should perceive that being a moral person is more self-definitional relative to other identities (Blasi, 2004). Furthermore, the moral self-schema of someone for whom moral identity is highly central should be activated more strongly and more frequently than the other self-schemas comprising his or her net-work of self-identities (Higgins & Brendl, 1995). The greater the centrality of moral identity is, the higher its *activation potential* and the stronger its ability to affect information processing and moral behavior. Activation potential refers to the extent to which a knowledge structure tends to be readily accessible for processing and acting on information (Higgins & Brendl, 1995).

### **3.3.3 Accessibility of moral identity**

The social-cognitive view of the self-concept as a network of identity schemas recognizes that people balance multiple identities and that only a few can be held in consciousness at any given time. People must balance multiple and sometimes competing identities, of which only a subset – known as the *working self*-concept – is activated at any given time. The regulatory influence of moral identity is likely to wax and wane as it becomes more rather than less available for processing and reacting to information in any given situation.

The influence of any identity that comprises the working self-concept is a function of how accessible that identity is in a given situation. Research has shown that the accessibility of moral identity within the working self-concept should determine the extent to which it influences moral behavior. Aquino et al. (Aquino, Felps, Freeman, Lim, & Reed, 2009) found that moral intentions and behaviors will be a joint function of (a) the centrality of moral identity to an individual's self-conception and (b) the extent to which situational cues temporarily affect the current accessibility of the moral self-schema within the working self.

### **3.3.4 Situational Factors**

As discussed above there are several things that can influence the salience – or accessibility – of moral identity, affecting whether moral identity is a part of the working self or not. The importance of moral identity, referred to in this study as centrality of moral identity, is one of the factors. The other important force can be grouped into one variable called *situational factors*.

The relationship between situational factors and the salience of moral identity needs further research, but there are studies that show that it is possible to prime people to make the moral identity more salient (Reed & Levy, 2007). An understanding of this relationship might open up for facilitating moral behavior in organizations by finding ways to activate the moral identity in the working self. Previous research suggests that examples of such contextual factors might be the organization's values, moral exemplars (heroes) in the organization, or a focus on meaning rather than money.

### **3.3.5 Moral Behavior**

In this study I choose to include both moral judgment and moral action in the moral behavior variable, which means that the individual is thinking through the moral aspects of the

decision, makes a judgment on what is right or wrong based on his or her values, and then acts according to this judgment.

As a researcher I do not want to be the judge of what is right or wrong, since there in most moral dilemmas is no such thing as right or wrong – it is a matter of preferences in conflicting values. Therefore, I find it appropriate to define moral behavior based on what each individual consider the right thing to do, which implies that moral behavior can be defined as *acting according to one's own values*.

### **3.3.6 Happiness**

In this thesis, I define happiness as Seligman's (2010) PERMA-theory, consisting of *Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement*. It is important to split the happiness variable into these five components because it is conceivable that moral behavior affects people differently and that multiple components can be affected simultaneously.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

*“Excellence is not an act, it’s a habit”*

– Aristotle

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present how I have gone about conducting this thesis. The reasons for describing this in such detail are many. First, it adds some credibility to my research, knowing that I have been aware of the decisions I have made and their implications on the study. Second, it provides some insight to what I have done throughout this research project, which both provides transparency and trust, in addition to making it easier for the reader to understand how the findings and conclusions came to be. Last, it strengthens the replicability of the study, meaning that other researchers can test my findings using the same methods as I have used. However, it is important to note that replicability is not the greatest strength of the methods I have chosen, which will be discussed more thoroughly later on in this chapter.

Further, I want to point out that this thesis is based on the assumption that research design in qualitative research is an iterative process that shifts focus back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of how choices in purpose, theory, research question, research method and validity effect each other and then modify to better function as one logical framework for creating new knowledge (Maxwell, 2012, s. 77). This means that this study does not follow a pre-made model of research design, it has *components of different designs and methods*, customized to fit the research questions as well as possible.

## 4.2 Research Design

### 4.2.1 Nature of the Research: Exploratory vs. Explanatory

The nature of this study is mainly *exploratory*, as the aim is to explore and get a deeper understanding of the different components of moral decision making. According to Saunders et al. (2012) exploratory studies are valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest, and is particularly useful if you wish to

clarify your understanding of a problem, such as if you are unsure of the precise nature of the problem. Exploratory research has the advantage that it is *flexible* and *adaptable* to change, and the path of the research will typically change as new data and new insights appear.

This thesis also has components of an explanatory nature. An *explanatory* study involves studying a problem or situation in order to explain the relationships between variables, often with the aim of establishing causalities (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). From the research model and hypotheses you can see that some components of this study are more of an explanatory nature, trying to test relationships between variables that are suggested in prior research.

#### **4.2.2 Research approach: Inductive vs. deductive**

There are two main approaches to conducting research; deduction and induction, which are primarily based on how theory and conclusions are derived. *Deduction* starts with theory which is later tested through a research strategy (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Deductive reasoning occurs when the conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). In contrast, *inductive* reasoning starts with collecting data to explore a phenomenon and then generating theory from the findings from the data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). In inductive reasoning there is a gap in the logic argument between the conclusion and the premises observed, the conclusion being “judged” to be supported by the observations made (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

Following my explorative intent, an inductive approach seems to be appropriate. On the other hand, this field of research has a lot of good theory which needs further in-depth testing, which fits well with a deductive research approach. Saunders et al. (2012) note that research approaches does not have to be rigid divisions, and that the best approach is combining deduction and induction in the way most suitable for the specific research at hand. Along the same lines, Arbnor and Bjerke (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, s. 8) believe that “methodology is not a recipe found in a cookbook, it is not decided by finding the one suitable method for the specific problem you wish to study”. Methodology is, as a “creator of knowledge”, actively choosing techniques based on reflections about what makes a study consistent and fitted for the task at hand (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Because of the amount of and complexity of the theory in the field of moral decision making, in addition to the lack of united theory and deep

knowledge on the issues discussed in Chapter 1, the most suitable research approach for this thesis is a combination of deduction and induction.

One method that combines an inductive and deductive approach is the *Grounded Theory Method*. In Grounded Theory an inductive approach is used to develop a grounded theory around the core findings that emerges from the data. Further, the grounded theory is tested through collection of more data, and data are analyzed continuously throughout the data gathering process. Data collection will continue until no new findings emerge within the core categories of the grounded theory. Thus, the process is both inductive and deductive, and the sample selection is central to the research process. This thesis follows the Grounded Theory Method in many ways. First, the initial step of the research process was gathering data through broad and explorative interviews with decision makers. As data was gathered and analyzed, alongside with a thorough literature study, a grounded theory was developed and further explored through additional interviews. As new findings emerged and new questions arose, changes were made to the content of the interviews throughout the data gathering process.

This thesis is deductive in the way that theory is gathered through a literature study, which further evolved into a research model with hypotheses based on the findings from the initial interviews and findings from the literature. Developing hypotheses and testing them through data collection is a clearly deductive approach, which typically involves quantitative data to either confirm or reject the hypotheses. Even though this thesis has a research model with hypotheses, the model is not treated as it would be in a purely deductive approach. I see the research model and hypotheses more as assumptions and *guidelines*, rather than a strictly testable framework.

#### **4.2.3 Research design: Qualitative**

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, in addition to the fact that a lot of the literature on this topic is based on quantitative techniques at a more general level, I find it appropriate to explore the topic of decision making on a deeper level through qualitative strategies. The research strategy for gathering data in this thesis is *semi-structured interviews*, which will be described in further detail in the following section.

## 4.3 Data Gathering

The initial interviews had a broader focus where the purpose was to get an overview of the topic, to understand more of the moral decision making processes, and to see which topics related to moral decision making would be fruitful and interesting for the further research in this study. As described in section 4.4 Data Analysis, *constant comparison of data* was made to give direction for the further interviews. In addition to the constant comparison and theoretical sampling, I conducted a thorough literature study which was important for guiding the focus of this thesis.

Throughout the process of gathering data the focus of the interview changed and became narrower as more samples were studied. Based on some findings and my thorough literature study, I decided to narrow the focus on *Moral Identity* and its relation to the decision making process and happiness (see Chapter 3: Research Model). However, the overall design stayed the same: I used the same sampling method, interview technique, ethical considerations, interview guide design and the same method of analysis. In the coming section I will describe the process of data gathering and the decisions I made.

### 4.3.1 Literature Study

Simultaneously as the first interviews were designed and conducted I began the search for relevant literature for this study. I mainly used Google Scholar and the MIIS Library in this process, and the access to and amount of literature related to the topic was almost overwhelming. From the articles I found, I dived even deeper into the different topics by looking up the primary references which lead to yet more articles. As mentioned earlier the topic of moral decision making is a crossroad of philosophy, psychology and behavioral economics. The amount of literature in the field is overwhelming *and* limiting – overwhelming in the sense that there is an ocean of articles to drown in, and lacking in the sense that most of the studies are not uniting the three main fields.

My aim for this thesis was not to unite this gap in literature, but at the same time it was necessary to include theories from the different fields to provide a broader and more holistic background for my thesis. There is a fine balance between too much theory and too little, and one should be careful including theories that are not actively used in the design of the research model and the discussion of the findings. I have tried my best finding this balance, which ultimately resulted in the critical Literature Review in Chapter 2. However, in choosing

between too much or too little literature, I find it in this case better including too much because of the lack of united literature and the benefits to the reader for having a broader understanding of the topic before learning about the details of this study.

### **4.3.2 The Interviews**

#### ***Sampling Method***

Overall, the sampling method of this study has followed the method of Grounded Theory, which is *theoretical sampling*. In Grounded Theory data will be *analyzed continuously*, and the categories being developed will indicate the type of new cases (or participants) to select for further data collection (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The purpose of this sampling is to pursue the theoretical lines of enquiry rather than to achieve representativeness. This theoretical sampling continues until *theoretical saturation* is reached, which is when data collection ceases to reveal any new properties that are relevant (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

For the initial six interviews I wanted to explore how people make decisions with regard to moral issues in organizational contexts. In choosing participants I wanted diversity in age, gender, experience and occupation, but at the same time it was important that there was something uniting these participants. I conducted six semi-structured interviews with three female and three male participants. The interviewees were a mix of business students, academicians and business practitioners, which means they all have the business background in common, in addition to being decision makers in organizational contexts. The method of sampling was a mix between *convenience sampling* and *theoretical sampling*.

For the next section of interviews I started out focusing on people that presumably had a strong and central moral identity; whistleblowers, social entrepreneurs, and people that are devoting a lot of time and resources on non-profit projects. The findings lead me in the direction of also researching people at the other end of the scale; people in “dirty” industries and companies with a solely profit maximizing focus. The more people I interviewed the more supporting the findings were. I could possibly have interviewed more people to achieve higher theoretical saturation, but due to time and resource constraints for this thesis it was necessary stop exploring at a reasonable number of respondents.



### ***Designing the Interview Guide***

I designed mainly *two different interview guides* for the semi-structured interviews; one for the first six interviews and another one for the following five interviews (see Appendix). In addition to this, there were small variances in the content of every interview, based on findings from previous interviews and interesting topics that emerged during the interviews. The second interview guide was more in depth on the topic of moral identity, but still provided flexibility to me as a researcher and the respondent, and was considered more a guiding rather than binding framework.

In designing both of the interview guides I wanted the conversation with the interviewees to be based on some specific decisions they had made. Decision making is a complex topic in the first place, and adding the ethics component makes it even harder formulating questions that are of some measurable value and at the same time possible for the interviewees to answer. A difficulty when it comes to asking questions about morality and identity is that the topic might be hard to grasp, and answers can be too lofty and general to be measured and categorized. Relating all of the questions to *specific decisions* make the data more detailed and grounded in real life situations. When the two decisions are contrasting (positive-negative or proud/regretful) this provides a foundation for comparing the data, enabling comparison for each respondent and between respondents.

Interview Guide I consisted of three themes: characteristics of the decisions, mood, and post mode evaluations. Interview Guide II consisted of four themes: characteristics of the decisions, situational factors, happiness, moral identity. Within these themes I constructed *open ended questions*, which allows the researcher to dig deeper on interesting topics and allowing participants to more freely elaborate and reflect upon the questions asked. When constructing the variables and questions for the interview guides, I used prior research to find inspiration on how to *operationalize* (and measure) the variables in a suitable way. However, not all themes and variables had sufficient information on how to measure and operationalize, so creativity and critical thinking was necessary to create the interview guides.

### ***The Interview Setting***

Prior to the interviews I sent the interview guide to all participants. I did this of several reasons. First, letting the interviewees know the content of the interview seems fair and ethical, especially when preventing insight to the questions will not give any methodological benefits. Second, giving the interviewees access to the questions gives them more time to

ruminate the topic and thereby provide deeper and more reflected answers. Last, it saves time, since the interviewees can do some of the thinking beforehand. This is important since the interviewees are busy people, and as a researcher I see it as important to respect their busy time schedule and not take up their resources for too long.

The first six interviews in this study were all conducted in Norwegian. Five out of the six interviews were done in person, audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. The sixth interview was done through the video conference tool FaceTime, and because of no audio recording thorough notes were made during the interview and right after the interview was done. For the next section of interviews, two interviews were conducted in person – one in Monterey, California and one in Bergen, Norway. The other three interviews were done through the video conference tools Skype or FaceTime, and one of these was not recorded. The reason for two of the interviews not being recorded was technical difficulties, but thorough notes were made during and after the interview to capture most of the details. The lack of recordings for some of the interviews might be a disadvantage, but I have tried to get around that by sending the interview notes to the interviewees for *consent* and the opportunity to *supplement* the notes.

According to Saunders et al. (2012) there are multiple considerations to be made when designing an interview situation. For example location should be convenient and give a sense of security. For the video interviews I have less control over the environment, other than making sure I am in a quiet and private place and trusting the interviewee in finding a similar place of their own. For the in person interviews I found private meeting rooms or other suitable locations, such as a beautiful quiet garden in Monterey with no people around. For all interviews I have made sure to be on time and not exceeding the time available for the interview. Most interviews lasted one hour, but for participants that had more time available the conversation lasted a bit longer. For every interview I explained the purpose of the study, assuring *anonymity* and *confidentiality*, and ensuring consent for recording. All interviews were held in the participant's mother tongue, either English or Norwegian, to ensure authentic meetings and the comfort of a first language. Overall I have tried to establish a bond of trust with the interviewees, both for the purpose of authentic and true meetings and for the quality of data collection.

## 4.4 Data Analysis

### 4.4.1 Preparing the Analysis

As already mentioned, most of the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim, i.e. word by word. For the interviews that were not recorded, thorough notes were taken during and after the interview. After every interview I made time to take notes and sum up my first impression of what the main findings from each interview were. After transcribing I would go over the notes again and add more findings and details, and for the interviews that were conducted and transcribed in Norwegian I also had to translate the content to English. Having to translate the data involves the *risk of changing or losing the meaning* of some things, but I consider it preferable over having the respondents answer the interviews in their second language which could also disrupt the data because of possible difficulties expressing themselves sufficiently and feeling uncomfortable during the interview. When translating the transcribed interviews I focused on capturing the essence rather than a word by word translation.

### 4.4.2 Method of Analysis: Grounded Theory Analysis

The Grounded Theory Method is often associated with a number of defined procedures to collect and analyze data, with a number of precise procedures to be followed in relation to each of its analytical processes (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). However, different approaches have emerged, and some are less strict than the original method (e.g. Chamaz, 2006). I have not followed a strict method, but rather put emphasis on the three main procedures that are important for the analysis of data: 1) *constant comparison*, 2) *theoretical sampling*, and 3) *theoretical saturation*. How I treated theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation was discussed earlier in this chapter, so this section will mainly focus on the constant comparison of data.

In general the data analysis process can be divided in two parts; initial coding and focused coding (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). In *initial coding* the data that you collect will be disaggregated into conceptual units and labeled, the same label will be given to similar units of data. These labels can relate to a few words, a sentence, a number or sentences or a paragraph. An example of a label is “Values” which can contain words or sentences related to the interviewees’ values. Here it must be noted that there is ongoing analysis in the process of labeling and categorizing the data; for example for the label “Values” some units will be

obvious (like “Loyalty is an important value to me”) while some will be more hidden and indirect (like “I felt bad for not protecting her”, which could in the context indicate the value of caring). The emphasis in Grounded Theory Model is to derive meaning from the subjects and settings being studied and the categorization of data leads to concepts and themes that give direction for the further research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Initially the scope of the research question is broadly focused and as you get further into the process you develop a narrower focus.

The *focused coding* involves reanalyzing your data to test which of your initial codes may be used to categorize larger units of data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Codes with the capacity to categorize larger units of data are usually those who proved to be important and frequently used during initial coding. Chamaz (2006) emphasizes a Grounded Theory Method that is interactive, flexible and less defined – where analysis develops from constantly comparing data to codes and codes to data to develop higher levels of abstraction. Chamaz (2006) sees the data analysis process as an iterative process shifting back and forth from initial coding to focused coding as patterns and categories emerge. An example of this focused coding categorizing “values” and “life goals” into a larger category of “moral identity”.

## 4.5 Validity

### 4.5.1 Internal Validity

Internal validity is established when your research demonstrates a causal relationship between variables. In semi-structured and in-depth interviews a high level of validity may be achieved where these are conducted carefully due to the scope to *clarify questions*, to probe meanings and to be able to *explore responses and themes from a variety of angles* (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). When conducting the interviews I asked follow-up questions to make sure I understood the interviewees correctly, and I asked more detailed questions from different angles when exploring the relationship between the variables to make sure I understood the relationships correctly. There is only one method of research, experiments, that can isolate variables to prove unambiguous causal relationships between variables, but the flexibility of a

semi-structured interview is considered a strong method as long as the interviewer explores the relationships between the variables in a thorough manner.

#### **4.5.2 Construct and Communicative Validity**

Construct validity is concerned with the extent to which your research measures actually measure what you intend them to assess (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012), but this is more related to quantitative methods of research. For qualitative research, a more relevant measure of validity is communicative validity, which concerns the extent to which the researcher *interpret the communication accurately* and in the way intended by the interview subject (Imms, 1987). To ensure communicative validity I let the interviewees have a look at the written material from the interviews to confirm my interpretations and having the opportunity to add and correct information.

#### **4.5.3 External Validity**

External validity is about the extent to which the findings from the research can be generalized to other contexts, such as other settings or groups. A semi-structured interview cannot be generalized statistically due to its qualitative research design and small (and unrepresentative) sample size (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). By using this methodology it is impossible to achieve an optimal degree of external validity, but the findings can still be used to *discover patterns and hints* about what might be true for the population, and such hints are valuable for future quantitative research with the aim of generalizing the findings.

Additionally, it must be noted that the sample of this study is *heterogeneous*, both with regard to age, gender, educational background, nationality, industry and positions as decision makers in organizational contexts. This is an advantage in the way that findings across this diverse group of people might indicate some degree of generalizability for the population as a whole. On the other hand, this must also be considered a challenge, since differences between these individuals may be due to several different factors which are difficult to isolate.

## **4.6 Reliability**

Reliability refers to whether the data collection techniques and analytic procedures would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or if they were replicated by a different researcher (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, s. 192). In general,

there are concerns regarding reliability related to qualitative research techniques like semi-structured interviews because of the lack of standardization and the fact that they are often not meant to be repeatable (since they reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation which might be subject to change). However, an attempt to make a study more replicable by other researchers would not be realistic or feasible without undermining the strength of this type of research – which is the *flexibility to explore* the complexity of the problem (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). For this type of research reliability is therefore more about *showing transparency* than being replicable, which will make it easier for other researchers to understand the processes being used and enable them to reanalyze the collected data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

There are several biases that threaten the reliability of studies like this one. First, there is the *interviewer bias*, where comments, tone, or non-verbal behavior of the interviewer creates bias in the way interviewees respond to the questions being asked (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). To avoid this bias, I have tried to act as neutral, open, accepting, objective and professional as possible in meeting with the interviewees. A second threat is the *interviewee/response bias*, which entails interviewees refraining from answering questions, or not answering questions honestly and accurately (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The interviewee bias can originate in many reasons, for example perceptions about the interviewer, lack of trust, shyness, sensitive information, or fear of not ensuring anonymity. In order to avoid this bias I have tried to give the interviewees comprehensive information about the study and the ways their privacy and anonymity can be ensured.

Furthermore, I have focused on establishing a relationship built on trust, care and respect, which will make the interviewees feel more comfortable talking about sensitive topics. I believe that trust is an iterative process, where both parts have to give up some vulnerability to establish a bond of trust – and this involves showing a human side, not only being a researcher maintaining some distance to stay professional. I believe acting professionally and acting human is not in conflict, they are both important aspects of being a good researcher. The last threat is the *participation bias*, which implies that the people that agree to participate in the study is not a random sample, and might inherit specific characteristics that are not representative for the population as a whole (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). I do not consider this a major issue in this study, because the sample size is too small to really

generalize for the whole population, in addition to the sample being very diverse and all interview subjects agreed to participate immediately.

## 4.7 Research Ethics

*“In every meeting you hold some of the other person’s life in your hands”*

- Knud E. Løgstrup -

This quote from Løgstrup is of great importance to me, and since the first time I heard it I have tried to have it in mind for every meeting in my life – and especially when interacting with the interview subjects for this thesis. Løgstrup emphasizes relationships and intimacy in his ethics, and the potential power you have in any meeting with other individuals should be treated with respect. Further, a good meeting requires trust between the meeting parts, which in turn cannot be accomplished without the individuals showing courage to be vulnerable towards each other (Brown, 2012).

Conducting research like this involves a lot of vulnerability on the interviewees’ part. Giving a researcher (in fact a stranger) access to deep thoughts and personal experience requires a lot of trust, in addition to time and resources. These trusting, open and giving acts are of great admiration from my part, and they deserve the same amount of respect and trustworthiness in return. The following section describes how I have worked ensure the highest level of quality regarding the moral issues related to my research.

### 4.7.1 Informed Consent

The principle of informed consent involves researchers providing sufficient information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach a fully informed, considered and freely given decision about whether or not to participate, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Thus, it is my aim to meet the interview subjects with respect and care, ensuring their autonomy and privacy rights through being open and truthful, without compromising the quality of research.

Before each interview the interview participant was informed about the purpose of the study, as well as consent on voluntary participation. In addition to this, they were given insight to the content of the interview by receiving the interview guide prior to the interview. As a

researcher I considered this the right thing to do, as it would possibly establish trust and transparency, in addition to the participants having the opportunity to prepare before the interview. Additionally, the participants were informed about the approximate duration of the interview, and how their anonymity and privacy would be ensured. In interviews with open-ended questions there is always a risk of unveiling information that was not anticipated by the outlook of the study, which can question whether it is possible to truly obtaining an informed and voluntary consent. To limit the issues in this regard, I gave the interview participants the opportunity to review the some of the written material post-interview to allow a re-consent opportunity.

#### ***4.7.2 Confidentiality and Data Handling***

Ensuring the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity does not only apply during the interviews, but is important throughout every step of the research process (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). When collecting the data (through interviews) one must try to record the data as accurately, fully and objectively as possible. This includes not stressing any specific topics, no leading questions or putting pressure on the participants to answer certain questions. By recording and transcribing the interviews word by word, taking detailed notes and by acting professional and objectively during the interview I believe I have done everything I can to present accurate data in this thesis.

The gathered data should be stored safely to maintain the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data, which implies not sharing this information with others and storing both tangible (paper) and digital data in a safe and secure manner. Further, one must ensure secure deletion of data when the research report is completed, and make sure no confidential, personal and identification information is stored after the project is done. At last, one must maintain the anonymity of the identity of participants when reporting the data, as well as reporting accurately, objectively and maintaining confidentiality. To ensure this safety and anonymity I have labeled all recordings, transcribed interviews and interview notes anonymously, not linking the identity of the participants to the data. As soon as the interviews were transcribed I deleted the recordings, and I have not shared any of the information with others than my supervisor Knut Ims.



## 4.8 Weaknesses and Limitations

The most important limitation of this study is the time and resource constraints. With more time and resources on hand I could have increased the sample size and the scope of research. Especially since sampling technique is based on theoretical sampling, more time and a larger sample size could have provided a higher level of theoretical saturation. Also, more time for each interview, or multiple interviews with the same individuals, could have provided more depth to the research.

A second weakness is that I cannot know for sure whether the respondents answered the questions in a truthful and honest manner. A respondent may give false information or hold back information about his or her life and experiences. Especially since a significant part of the interview is about a decision that the interviewee considers regretful, shame and blameworthy parts of the stories might drive the interviewee to intentionally or unintentionally telling the story inaccurate. Besides the measures I have discussed earlier in this chapter there is not much I can do to control this issue. One solution is interviewing other people that know the participant to verify the data, but this would be time and resource consuming in addition to the potential issue of these people not presenting the data accurately either. For me it comes down to trusting the participants and creating a trusting and safe environment for the interviewees to be open and honest. Another issue related to this research method and the interview design is post evaluation biases. Humans do not necessarily remember the past accurately, e.g. when it comes to remembering mood, pain, and what actually happened in the specific situation. This implies that even if the interviewees are trying their best to remember and retell the story of the decisions accurately, there is a high risk of their memory being biased.

Another weakness that I have mentioned earlier is the lack of recordings for two of the interviews. Having to trust and be dependent upon my own memory of the interviews increases the risk of losing important details or misinterpreting findings. By taking detailed notes during and after the interview, keeping an objective approach, and giving the respondents the chance to verify and add data I hope that this weakness does not deteriorate the quality of this research. Related to this is the issue of presence and focus during the interviews. As a researcher it is difficult to keep the conversation flowing and authentic at the same time as paying attention to details and making good notes. I think the interviews could

have been better if I could have focused on the conversation solely, but hopefully it is not a major weakness since it only affected two out of eleven interviews.

Last, there is a slight chance that the use of technology mediated meetings influenced the content of the interviews. Even though most people today, and especially business people, are used to communicating through video conference tools and phone calls it might have influenced their experience. Creating a trusting and authentic environment is sometimes easier in person than through video and audio calls, and this might have affected their openness towards me as an interviewer.

# Chapter 5: Findings

*“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom”*

– Aristotle

## 5.1 First Findings

As discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology this thesis is based on the Grounded Theory Method. This means that the topic of the interviews has slightly changed during the process of data gathering and data analysis, in addition to new literature being included along the way. Even though every interview is different from the other, the interviews can be grouped in two main categories. The first six interviews are more explorative, less founded on theories from the literature, and a little shorter in time with each interviewee. Due to less data and short meetings in this first section of interviews, I have chosen to not personalize the findings like I do in the next section. When citing the interviewees from the first six interviews I refer to them by numbers (see Appendix for list of participants), and in presenting the findings from these interviews I chose to present the findings collectively rather than as separate profiles. However, when analyzing the data in Chapter 5 the data from all eleven interviews are treated equally.

### 5.1.1 Main findings from the first six interviews

The first finding is that mood at the time of decision making proves to be difficult to research. First, most of my interviewees *did not remember the mood* at the point of decision unless it was an extreme case of mood. Based on these six interviews (and twelve decisions analyzed) it seems like extreme moods are not common, and five out of six interviewees could not remember being in any specific mood at the point of decision. Furthermore, researching mood offers challenges because many decisions are taken over a long period of time – either as a long decision process in the organization or as series of incremental decisions – which includes a variety of moods.

A second finding is that the interviewees showed *varying degrees of ethical sensitivity*, which is the ability to recognize that a moral issue exists (Sparks & Hunt, 1998). When answering the question “Were there any ethical issues or conflicting values related to the decisions?” some of the interviewees did not see the moral aspects of the decision situation. I think this

varying degree of ethical sensitivity can be partly explained by the difference in experience and education, because the academicians and business practitioners showed deeper insight on this topic than the business students. Regardless of the varying degree of ethical sensitivity, all decisions analyzed had some kind of ethical issues or elements.

Another important but not surprising finding from the first interviews is that all interviewees reported that the proud decision contributes to a positive mood (and happiness) in the long term. The interviewees said that the successful (proud) decision made them proud and happy at the point of decision, in the short term and in the long term. The proud decisions are something the interviewees like to think about on a regular basis, which makes it a *“sustainable” source of positive mood and happiness.*

When it comes to the blameworthy decision, the interviews indicate that this has little significance in the long term. As may be expected, it causes *negative mood in the short term*, but this is something most of the interviewees choose not to think about in the long term. In dealing with the negative decision the interviewees chose different strategies; some people try to ignore and forget about the decision, others processed it by talking to others, asking for forgiveness or tried to compensate in other ways by contributing more in other areas (remedy).

Based on the decisions analyzed in the interviews, it seems like the blameworthy decision often is *more impulsive*, while the proud decisions are more *thoughtful*. In relation to this, another finding is that in some cases the interviewees would have found it useful having some more time for making the decisions. On the other hand, some interviewees indicated the opposite; that more time would not have changed anything and someone even stated that *“having more time is almost like a waste of resources – it is important for efficiency and innovation that the company moves forward not spending too much time on every decision”*. These findings are pointing in opposite directions, but this could be interesting for future research. It could also be interesting looking into differences between men and women when it comes to time preferences.

The most interesting finding from the first interviews, as I see it, is that all interviewees (consciously and unconsciously) related the proud decision to their *identity*. In explaining why they chose the way they did, the proud decision was made because it felt right and reflected the person's *values* and who he or she wants to be. In retrospect, the decision helped to define

the person's identity, confirming and strengthening the moral identity. In this process and through post mode reflections on the decisions, the interviewees got to know themselves better. "Who I am and who I want to be," "conforming with my values", "it felt right", "something I stand for", "important to me" are some of the words used to explain why they made that specific decision. On this topic of moral identity I could see a difference between the students and the more experienced interviewees; it seemed like the experienced interviewees were *more aware of this connection* to their identity and they spoke more in depth and directly about their moral identity while the students talked more indirectly and unconsciously about this relationship.

### **5.1.2 Implications and Further Research – The Next Section of Interviews**

Based on the findings discussed above, I found it appropriate not to study the mood at point of decision. However, looking closer at how positive decisions affects the long term mood (happiness) for individuals is an interesting topic. Positive psychology has become popular also in business, and the findings from this pilot study indicate that positive (proud) decisions can be a sustainable source of long term happiness. This relationship should be researched in a deeper manner.

Another interesting topic is impulsive and thoughtful decisions and their relation to success and failure. Are the proud decisions more often thoughtful rather than impulsive? And are the thoughtful decisions really more successful or it is just easier to feel proud when more thought has gone into the decision making process? In addition to this, it would be interesting to see whether people would like to have more time for decisions and more perfect information (indicating perfectionism), and possibly how they would spend this extra time. Are there differences between genders, industries and leadership roles on this matter?

Based on the main findings from the pilot study, it would be interesting to look closer at how moral identity influence decisions, and also how decisions and decision outcome affects the individuals' (moral) identity. The interviews indicate that there is a relationship going both ways, where moral identity forms decisions and decisions forms the moral identity of the individual. In relation to this point, it would be interesting to examine how moral identity is formed, how people become acquainted with oneself, and whether different moral identities can be attributed to different characteristics (e.g. whether women have a different moral identity than men). These findings in addition to relevant literature gave directions for Interview Guide II and the following interviews.

## 5.2 Profiles

The second section of interviews are more focused and goes deeper into certain aspects of moral identity and the moral decision making process. In this section I will present some of the qualitative data gathered through the second sections of interviews in form of five interviewee profiles. I think creating such profiles is beneficial in several ways. First, the interviewees are so diverse that a deeper understanding of each individual will make it easier understanding the discussion of the findings. This chapter can be viewed as an introduction to the findings which will be further discussed in the next chapter, but this provides a good fundament for the reader to understand the discussion and my decisions as a researcher.

Due to anonymity and confidentiality issues I had to give the interviewees new names. Rather than giving numbers, I thought that giving them real names with a meaning would help to point to the central aspects of each person and make the profiles more lucrative and complete, in addition to treating the interviewees as persons rather than just sources of data. To give the profiles a context I decided to pick the most suitable names from Norse Mythology.

### 5.2.1 Sigurd

When first meeting Sigurd at a conference, my first impression was that he is a positive and enthusiastic person who uses humor to get in touch with people. His smiling and positive nature is contagious, and he is clearly a person that enjoys engaging in conversations with new people. Our second meeting is located in a beautiful public garden in Monterey, where we could enjoy the privacy and beauty of nature. Through the interview I got to learn that there are many different sides to this man besides what his first appearance indicates.

Unlike most of the interviewees, who struggle coming up with two examples, Sigurd had prepared a bunch of decisions. Not only does this say something about his interest and enthusiasm for the topic and his willingness to help – it says a lot about what kind of life he has chosen to live. He offers to talk me through six decisions and let me decide what is most appropriate for the interview. While listening to his description of each decision it strikes me that there is a clear pattern between all these decisions: he's *the* whistleblower. His career and personal beliefs are deeply intertwined and everything he does reflect his ethics: the passion for doing good and doing right is Sigurd as a professional, as an activist and as a private person.

Sigurd does not feel comfortable using the words “proud” and “regretful” when talking about his decisions, so I let him use the terms positive and negative decision since that is more in line with what he feels about these decisions. Regarding the proud part, Sigurd explains “I’m not particularly proud. It is not like a proud moment for me, it was just the good feeling of doing the right thing. For me there was never any doubt whether the decision was good or not – it was about doing the right thing. It was about doing justice in a way, and being true. People should not get away with lying and cheating the public and doing harmful things to *our* environment”.

Sigurd puts great emphasis on the word ‘our’ when he is talking about environment. “Our environment is important. And the use of ‘the environment’ creates a distance, like we’re not responsible. Like it is some external factor that is just there and we can do nothing about”. This explains why Sigurd feels the responsibility to talk the cause of nature and environment – and this responsibility is what drives all the difficult decisions he has made. In all his decisions he could have chosen to close his eyes, but instead he takes responsibility and becomes the voice of moral actions. “I’m trained as a life guard –and when you’re trained as a life guard you can’t pass someone that is drowning. And that’s kind of what this was like: I saw our community drowning and I had to help. So it wasn’t really much of a decision – you have to help!”. He talks further about this relationship to nature “I feel responsibility of protecting these places that I know and love. The forests and nature around here...I know them very well. They’re kind of like my friends, and I want to protect my friends. And nature can’t vote. So that is important to me.”

The decision Sigurd characterizes as negative is particularly interesting because there are so many positive things about it – the motivation, the rightness and the end results. Sigurd accomplished what he wanted, but at a high personal cost. “I underestimated the power of politics and what people are willing to do to gain power and keeping face. I should have realized that all the factors were not in place for this decision to work out. Although, I did what I felt was the right thing to do, and I showed care for someone that did harmful things”. Even when dealing with “criminals”, Sigurd shows mercy and care. “We had all agreed on the main decision of exposing this information to the public, which implied this leader would have to go. I thought that informing him about what was going to happen and giving him the chance to resign and save his reputation was the human thing to do, despite his harmful actions. And people agreed with me on this, encouraging me to inform him. It is interesting

how people were very supportive of me doing the work, and when things backfired everyone ran for the hills.” I can see that this decision had great impact on his life by the sad look on his face. “The following years were a hard time for me. I was glad I could see my work had results, but being personally attacked by politicians and media was tough. They had the aim of censoring me, and to some degree they succeeded”.

When I ask about the risk and potential costs related to all the decisions Sigurd introduced me for, Sigurd looks at me with surprise and wonder. “Risks and costs? What do you mean?”, this is clearly not of his concern when making the decisions. “To me these decisions are not about calculations and pro-con analysis; it is about what is right. And I never wanted to be a public person, or the spokesperson of a cause, but I had no choice but taking responsibility when no one else did”. He looks back at the first major decision he made, the first time he made a public appearance. Before that, he had mostly worked with these issues more in the background. Becoming a public person was a big step for him; “I cherish my private life and my family. I don’t want people digging in my private and family life, I want to protect that part. I would like to do what I do without being a public person, but that is not possible. When you first go public, there is no way back – so that was a threshold for me”. Reflecting upon how this has changed him, he notes “After becoming a publicly known person, the decisions from there on was easier. And as you learn and gain experience, I think making decisions become easier over the years. Also, when you keep doing the same thing over and over, it becomes less of a decision and more of a habit. Many of my decisions I do not see as decisions, since I have no choice but doing what I think is right”.

Does it make you happy to think back on the positive decisions? Despite being an above average positive person, Sigurd replies in all seriousness “I don’t really look back at these decisions like that. Of course they’re a part of me, this is who I am. But I don’t seek joy in them; I seek joy in other things in life like enjoying this meeting in this beautiful garden”. And what have you learned about yourself from these decisions? “If you’re out in the woods and you see some leaf litter from a tree on a rock. Then you brush the leaves and pine needles off the rock, and you see the rock. That is kind of how I see this. It shows other people who I am. It is no surprise to me – I know what I am made of – but it shows other people more sharply what I am.”

And last, what is a good life for Sigurd? “I have it! This is it!” he says laughing.



### 5.2.2 Unni

I met with Unni on a Friday morning. Her lively appearance and the coffee in our cups made this early meeting anything but sleepy. The two decisions that Unni chose for this interview are both dated some years back, but she remembers both of them like it was yesterday. And they are surprisingly similar – both of them are about quitting her job. The regretful decision is the time she got a new job, and her boss wanted her to keep it a secret to the other people in the company that she was leaving. “My leader asked me to not tell anyone about my decision to leave, to help them stay focused on delivering the work. So I walked around not telling people the truth about leaving the company, and this was hard for me. I had to stand upright knowing something the others didn’t know, and just keep going to finish the deliverables. But you have to find some honesty and credibility for yourself too. There is a tension between being true and authentic towards my co-workers and myself, and trying not to think about it and getting the job done.” Unni characterizes herself as a very open person that likes sharing, and that being used to sharing a lot made it even more difficult to hold back this information. And when the HR systems failed in hiding this information it resulted in her co-workers discussing the situation without her having the chance to tell them first.

“I wouldn’t say that I really regret the decision of holding back the information, but if it was only up to me I would have shared it with my fellow employees. My leader was sad to see me go. We had a close relationship, we worked really well together and we had been through a lot of pressure together. It felt natural to me to restore the harmony in our relationship – and not saying anything was the least I could do”. It is clear that relationships are important for Unni, and that is also something she seeks in her career. “When I have leaders I find it very interesting getting close to them and it is important to me to have close relationships with my leaders.”

On the other hand, Unni also points out that being a part of a bigger whole sometimes means putting yourself to the side. “You have some values yourself, but you are also a part of something bigger. And sometimes you need to show loyalty not to yourself, but loyalty towards a greater whole”. Being a part of a greater whole is one of the things that drive her. She is a team player and believes strongly in creating something together and building each other stronger. “I like people a lot, and I get a lot of good feedback on that, but I think it is my strength and my weakness. My identity – being very open. There is something special and beautiful about being close to other human beings. But when you’re a leader, or in other

professional contexts, sometimes you have to take a step back and just be professional collaborators. But I also believe in the magic that happens when you open up.”

The second decision is something Unni is extremely proud of, and she still considers it significant to the meaning of her identity. This was also a decision of leaving her job, but in entirely different circumstances. Unni saw that the company was not efficient enough and that the company structure needed some big changes – particularly two divisions of the company should be merged to improve the work flow and efficiency. Unni was the leader of one of these divisions, and when merging two divisions there is often the problem of two leaders – which of the leaders should go or be placed somewhere else in the company? Unni not only suggested the restructuring and merging of the divisions, but she also voluntarily said that she could leave the company – giving the leader position to the other person. “I am actually extremely proud of that decision” Unni says with a big smile. “I was brave for doing that, but it was also the right thing to do – it’s all about my identity. I managed to see the greater whole and I put the company’s needs in priority – the strategy of the company is more important than the strategy of the individual. It is what we create together that is important, and that is my identity – it is not my titles or my pay slip, it is creating something together with others, making change and pushing the boundaries.“

After some rough years and several difficult happenings in Unni’s life, she has become more aware of herself, her own values and goals. “I think it is important to find out what is in here [pointing at herself]. I did what was strategically right for the company, but also what was right for me personally – so it was a win-win situation.” She has spent a lot of time reflecting upon what means most to her and how to live a happy life. “Being in motion, being alive, and being in constant change – that is important to me! And love as the fundamental principle in life. Love is much bigger than a romantic relationship. Let love be the guiding principle and show love and care for the people around you.”

Behind her bubbly, young and energetic appearance Unni has a calmness to her and a strong sense of self. “Creating meaning in life is about what hit us in our soul. And to find something that will hit your soul, you will have to know something about what kind of soul you’ve got and opening up for meeting yourself. “

### 5.2.3 Njord

I met with Njord through the video conference tool FaceTime a late night in Norway, and the morning sun was shining in his office of a large multinational corporation somewhere far away. Right from the start he feels energetic and awake, almost alert in a way – ready to tackle the tasks and decisions coming his way. He has had a long career in a company and my impression is that he has a lot of experience from the corporate world; he is professional in everything he does, and his charisma tells me he combines the role of being a doer, analyst and a leader.

We start out talking about Njord's proud decision. This decision is the stereotype ethical dilemma you picture multinational corporations dealing with; transparency and corruption. "We got the license to operate in an African country. When you start operating in a new country, you have to pay taxes to the country, but some countries, like this case, also require large signature bonuses from entering companies. Our company has a transparency policy which implies publishing how much we pay to every country we operate. The dilemma emerged when this specific country had laws that prohibited publishing of these numbers." This decision was of high strategic importance and involved high financial risks for the company. "Not only was this a dilemma between sticking to our own values, possibly violating some established interpretations of local regulations and risk losing the license and billions of dollars. It was also a conflict between our company's own values. Transparency and compliance are two important values for us, and compliance means complying with all global and local laws in the countries we operate". What makes you proud of this decision? "What I am proud of is not only that we did what I think was the right thing, but we did it well. We developed a thorough strategy, followed through and succeeded. We published the numbers without being in conflict with the authorities of that country". For Njord it is important that the company sticks to its values, because the values are the core of the company and central to the identity of those who work there. "It is important that we maintain the company's integrity".

How does this relate to your goals in life? "For me, my main professional goal is helping this company becoming an even better and stronger company. A company with good values, a company showing courage and being a leading example in the industry, and a company that can survive and stay strong for a long time. Having a meaningful job is important to me, and I find meaning in being part of something greater than myself, and being a change agent

towards a better future”. What does this decision mean to you? “Personally it does not mean that much to me, but I think it means a lot to the company. All decisions you make becomes a part of you, you learn from them, you gain experience, and this will change who you are and how you make decisions. But besides that, this particular decision is not something I think about a lot.”

We move on to Njord’s regretful decision. “I still haven’t decided whether that was a bad decision or not, but I clearly have uncertainties about it. And I guess you could call it regretful in the sense that I would probably choose differently if I had the chance to do this decision all over again”. This particular decision was a hiring decision where they had to choose between an external candidate with long experience and a younger candidate from within the company, and they chose the more experienced “outsider”. When Njord looks back on this decision, he feels doubt not only because the candidate turned out to be less valuable than they thought; it was a value conflict for him; “I want this company to be a company that gives young people the chance to grow and learn, that gives young people opportunities. That is important to our culture and values.”

What have you learned from the decisions you have made? “I have learned many things, too many to sum up here. I have learned the importance of loyalty – being loyal to your company and being willing to move around to make things happen. The importance of paying attention and being hands-on. Also, the importance of sometimes realizing that others can do this job better than me, and thus make room for others.” Finally, I ask him what he has learned about what is a good life for him, and the answer is short and simple “The importance of family and good health”.

#### **5.2.4 Vidar**

I met with Vidar through FaceTime in the early morning in California where he is located. Despite the early hour and the technology mediating our meeting, Vidar’s energy and positivity is almost tangible. Vidar is an entrepreneur about to launch his startup; his business idea is soon to become reality and he is about to quit his safe and stable job for a more risky and uncertain future. But for Vidar this is exciting times – this is what drives him.

The two decisions we are about to analyze in further detail are both decisions for his new startup. The proud decision is his choice of partners for this startup – which is a critical

decision for a new company – and Vidar knows that surrounding yourself with talented people is the key to success. “I am proud that I got my two partners on board and I am proud of my business idea, my concept. My two partners are good professionals and they would not invest their spare time in something they don’t believe in. First, the fact that they joined my team is a proof of a good idea to begin with. Second, I am proud that I got so talented people on board.”

Vidar thinks highly of his partners and cherishes them not only for their skills and talents that will be valuable for the running of the business, but he cherishes them as good people that he trust gets along well with. Getting along with people does not seem to me like Vidar’s kind of problem, being very sociable, outgoing and the networking kind of guy. Still, he recognizes the value of good and stable relations. “Conflicts arise in businesses every day, conflicts are a part of business life. But being able to see which types of people that fit together and not is an important skill, because at the end of the day business is all about people. This is why ‘people skills’ are so important – in the end it is not about the specs or numbers, it’s about the people.”

From his happy feelings about his business partners, I can see that Vidar feels a lot of regret and blame for the second decision. The second decision is his choice of ownership structure of the company, which has shown not to be viable for several reasons. First, he should have kept a bigger part to himself for being the main founder and having a clear majority of the shares. Second, the ownership structure will not be viable in the eyes of investors, and can be viewed as a ‘lazy’ beginner’s mistake. “I see the problem being that I made a promise both verbally and legally to my partners, and now I will have to go back on my word and cause conflict so early on in the process – because this will definitely cause conflict. We are in the phase where we’re trying to get a product built, and now we’ll have a conflict on a company that has actually zero customers and zero revenue, and zero investments. So before we get off the ground we’re going to be fighting over some mysterious sum of money that we don’t even have – and this is going to be a distraction. This restructuring of the ownership is a necessary evil, something that has to happen, but I regret that we didn’t structure like that from the beginning.”

Vidar describes both decisions as easy and instinctive at the time being, and he says that a lot of decisions in business are based on gut feeling. When he is reflecting upon the reasons for this structuring mistake he states that “The reason for this mistake is me not doing proper

research. I was so eager to get going that I didn't think through the consequences... Being an entrepreneur you have to think long term and short term at the same time, and you'll have to do long term and short term planning within five minutes. So your mind has to be constantly able to adapt to the five minute issue and also what is going to happen five months down the line." This might indicate that Vidar has one of the typical characteristics of what is common for entrepreneurs; the need to see progress and keep moving forward. Some kind of impatience. In relation to this he once again bring up his partners, "It feels good thinking of my partners and that they have my back in this project. They often surprise me with great ideas and views that I haven't thought of and they remind me of things that I should focus on. They keep me motivated, because now I'm responsible for their time and effort. Being responsible for someone else stabilizes you and motivates you."

So what have you learned from these decisions? "I have learned that I'm a pretty good judge of character". "And I have also learned that I'm not as brave as I should be sometimes" he says laughing. Vidar also talks about learning to know yourself, your qualities and your business style. "I believe most human beings on this earth are fantastic people, trying to survive, but certain personality types do not work together. And it's not about good person vs. bad person, in a business you have to understand that if your temperaments are too different it is not going to work. Over time you'll have to figure out your own style and be honest with yourself. And being honest with yourself gets easier as you get deeper into your career."

What have these decisions taught you about what is important in life? "I have learned that family is everything and that I can't risk their stability. Myself, I can handle a lot of risk and instability – I could eat rice for a year – but I cannot let my family be affected like that. Being an entrepreneur is always risky. The most important thing for me is minimizing the impact on my family." His goal with the new business is to provide safety to his family and teaching his children that anything is possible if you work hard. "I think for me one of the most important things is that I can run my own business so I can pass that down to my children. So they don't solely have to be entrepreneurs, but they'll know that that's an option for them. That they don't have to worry later in life that they can't find a job, and that they won't be afraid and they'll know that they can just do it on their own. This doesn't mean they won't fail, but I want them to know that they have options. I don't want young people - and especially my own children - to live a life full of fear."

### 5.2.5 Bodil

Bodil is the CEO of a big company in Norway. Despite her busy schedule Bodil was immediately positive and eager to be interviewed for my study. Her proud decision happened recently when she and her company were negotiating a contract with another company. After the negotiations the other company came back with a contract stating that Bodil's company would be the subcontractor for another company – which was not agreed on during the negotiations. Bodil thought that this was reprehensible behavior both in terms of moral, legal and competitive reasons, and decided to not let them get away with this. Risking losing the whole deal, she confronted them and negotiated a new deal with better terms for her company. “What makes me proud is that I was brave enough to pick this fight and that I worked in such a professional manner that I won the case. Being a subcontractor affects our employees in several ways; their pride, their feeling of safety, and the difficulties in communication from having a customer like that. And I know that few people would have done the same because they see it as too risky potentially ruining the relationship with the other company. For me this is about the pride and integrity of the company, and that is something I can't let pass”

Bodil has had a long career and has experience from many different industries and companies. My impression is that she is a strong and brave woman, and that she is highly respected both by her own employees and competitors in the industry. What does this decision mean to you? “Oh, it means a lot to me! It shows that I make a difference. I am proud of doing something good for the company. It shows that if you work hard and show courage you will reach through.” What have you learned about yourself from this decision? “I've learned that I'm taken seriously and that people listen to me. This has given me additional confidence in myself and my abilities to make good decisions.”

The second decision, the one she regrets, was more difficult in some ways. The first one was provoking and it was natural for Bodil to take action. This decision was regarding a conflict between some of the employees, where Bodil felt a loyalty conflict on a deeper personal level. “I hired a person that I believe is very talented and bright – a great resource for the company. This person is disputed and many people feel threatened by her. I felt sure that she had great potential, but I also saw some of her shortcomings and the need for correction. She was supposed to work together with this other guy, who several times tried to lessen her role in the project. And the regretful part is that I let this happen; I gave some room for bullying her – or not necessarily bullying, but attempts of exclusion.” Later, Bodil corrected her mistake of

letting this happen and is now happy about the results, but she still feels bad for not dealing with it sooner. Letting some things pass is a part of organizational life especially as a leader, she says. As a leader you have to ignore some things and trust people further down in the organization deal with it, you cannot be responsible for monitoring every single employee in a big company. “It was hard for me, because it was about my loyalty towards those two employees. Since I had seen some of her shortcomings myself and I let him be right about her, I let it pass for too long. I regret not backing her up one hundred per cent from the beginning. Instead of being a coward and just having her back a tiny bit, I should have gone all in backing her completely, and then done some corrections and coaching. That’s what being a leader is all about – and that is a morally right and fair way to do it!”.

As I listen to Bodil reflecting upon these decisions, it comes clear to me that fairness is an important value to her. For the proud decision she says “It was natural for me to do something about this situation. When someone has made a mistake, is treating my company badly, and attempts foul play, it evokes a fierce competitiveness within me and an urge to correct and achieve justice.” She adds “Nobody is exempted from complying with the rules and you should not accept too much. This also has to do with your own integrity – you should be able to face yourself in the mirror at the end of the day.” For the regretful decision she put emphasis on the importance of having a fair chance to succeed in the company. “It is important to me to help people succeed and utilizing their talents in the best possible way. It is important that they get a fair chance to exploit their full potential”.

“What is important for a good life for me is that I make decisions that makes the everyday life of my employees the best possible. That we run a company with good processes, that people are well and are proud of their jobs. Being a subcontractor, which was the case for the proud decision, would have made my people suffer every day. It makes me happy that we don’t have to do that. Everyday life is what is important: that we earn money, provide secure jobs, that employees are well and that they are proud of working in this company.” And what have you learned about yourself from this? ”The first [proud] decision is about who I really am and what I mean to this company. That goes very deep; it is about my personal contribution. People have come to me afterwards and told me that I inspired them, and that is an important part of being a leader; being a role model for your employees. From the other decision I learned that being a spineless coward – not having your people’s back – is terrible. I let it pass



for too long and that is lack of decisiveness – and I don't want to be like that. As I said, I want to be a positive role model!"

# Chapter 6: Analysis

*“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”*

– Aristotle

## 6.1 Introduction

Basing each interview on two specific decisions made by the interviewee provides two main advantages. First, it makes sure the data is related to real life situations rather than their interpretation of how they make decisions in general. Second, it makes it easier for the interviewee to report details about the decision making process and its circumstances. Adding the proud and regretful component might provide data for comparison, since those are two extreme cases. Even though the guidelines for choosing two decisions for the interview were pretty detailed (see Interview Guide I and II in Appendix), there was room for many differences between the decisions. The decisions varied in many dimensions: individual vs. jointly decisions, long vs. short decision process, single decision vs. series of decisions, private vs. business-related decisions, recent vs. old decisions, and impulsive vs. thoughtful decisions. Giving room for such differences was important to let the interviewees choose decisions that are interesting and important to them.

The disadvantage of this design is that *the decisions are different on many variables*, which makes it more difficult to understand the relationship between variables. Is there really a relationship? And if so, what can explain this relationship? Due to choice of research method and data gathering technique I cannot say anything for certain. Another implication of this is that I have to rely even more on my own interpretation and understanding of the individuals I met. I have tried to treat this vulnerability in research method as good as possible, using my empathy, critical thinking and “people skills” in a professional and objective manner to understand these individuals in a fair and accurate way.

## 6.2 A Review of Definitions

### 6.2.1 What is Moral Behavior?

The first thing I find necessary to discuss is my definition of moral behavior. In Chapter 3: Research Model, I defined moral behavior as *acting according to your own values*. This

definition worked fine for this research, but has major limitations when it comes to studying a broader population. This definition is based on two assumptions; 1) all human beings are fundamentally good and possess good values, and 2) immoral behavior is due to lack of utilizing the good values, not a lack of good values. I think these two assumptions are true for many people, and in this study this limited definition of moral behavior worked fine. The reason for choosing this definition was that moral dilemmas usually have no right or wrong. If there is one clearly right decision and one clearly wrong decision it is most likely not a moral dilemma. Moral dilemmas are situations with conflicting values, where you have to prioritize between values that are important to you. Therefore, as a researcher, it was better to not take the role as the “moral judge” and rather let the interview subjects be the judge of their own actions.

However, it is important to see the limitations of this definition. I think there are many examples of people acting according to their own values and still acting immoral. Some people are willing to kill and do other harmful actions, fully aware of what they are doing and believing they are doing the right thing. Whether they are truly acting according to their values or whether there are situational factors disabling them to know their values and moral identity are important questions to ask. This question of “what is morality” is important to raise when researching moral behavior; would the world become a better place in everyone acted according to their values, or is there a set of universal values that should be followed? Philosophers have been asking these questions for thousands of years and there is still no clear answer to this. In finding the answer of this question I think a key gaining a deeper and broader understanding of humans’ moral identity. If we study thousands of people from different parts of the world, do we deep down have the same values and moral identity or are there big differences? This should be a focus for future research on the topic.

My definition of moral behavior does not pose a great threat to the quality of the data in this study, because all interviewees exposed values that are universally acknowledged as good and important. So for the further discussion of the findings, the definition of “moral behavior is acting according to your own values” is valid.

### **6.2.2 *Pride and Regret***

A second issue that must be discussed is the use of the words proud and regretful when describing the decisions. The interviewees were explicitly asked to choose one proud and one

regretful decision. The reason I chose those two words is that pride and regret often is rooted deeper than for example positive and negative decisions are. Pride and regret is connected to *stronger feelings*, while the words positive and negative are easier to transfer to more technical views on the decision. Making every decision a technical decision is a big problem in business (Mitroff, 1998) – we are trained to think in technical terms and see the technical aspects of a situation. I was afraid that if I asked about positive and negative decisions, the interviewees would connect this mostly to outcomes or processes rather than values and identity. This choice of wording worked well; pride and regret tend to reveal the individual's values and identity.

However, there are also some issues related to this choice. First, it is possible that a different wording would have provided different decisions. The interviewees' choice of decisions is very central and has great implications on the data – and different decisions might have provided different findings. Further, some interviewees did not feel comfortable with using the words proud and regretful, which indicates that it is related to some specific feelings that not everyone identifies with. In letting the interviewees use their own words in the cases where this was necessary does not impact the data as I see it, and overall the issue of wording is not significant.

## 6.3 Discussion of Hypotheses

### 6.3.1 Hypothesis 1: Centrality of Moral Identity

Prior research has shown that the centrality of moral identity affects whether the moral identity is a part of the working self in a given situation – i.e. how accessible the moral identity is at the time of decision. The findings from this study are to some extent limited when it comes to measuring this relationship because of sample size and number of decisions accessible for analysis. It would be preferable to have a larger sample of decisions for each decision maker to see whether people with a central moral identity engage in moral behavior more often than those with a less central moral identity. Since every interviewee in this study was asked to describe one proud and one regretful decision – and typically the proud decision is of a more moral character than the regretful one – there is limited data on how often each interviewee engages in moral behavior besides the general impression I get from their life stories.

However, there is one element that might partly explain this relationship. The individuals with a central moral identity chose to describe decisions with far more *ethical complexity* and moral character than the individuals with a less central moral identity. An example of this is Unni, who described a life altering decision where she put the company's interests before her own – and described the decision as being true and authentic. At the other end of the scale is Interviewee 3, who chose a technical decision and could not see any ethical nuances related to the decision. The question is what can explain this finding. Is it because the individuals with a central moral identity actually engage in moral behavior more often than those with a less central moral identity? Or is it because the individuals with a central moral identity are more morally oriented in general (i.e. more concerned with ethics) and thus chose decisions with a moral character rather than the “simpler” technical decisions in their life? This should be explored in future studies.

My general impression from their life stories can help enlighten this topic as well. The interviewees in this study varied in age, gender, nationality, education, employment and background. From their life stories, not only the two decisions discussed in the interview, I got a sense of the interviewee's general behavior and moral identity. For some of the interviewees that have a particularly *central moral identity* (e.g. idealist or philanthropic outlook) I could see a pattern of moral actions throughout their lives. For example Sigurd has chosen to dedicate his life to protecting our environment and repeatedly he chooses to do what he sees as right even when there is great risk and costs related to the decision. Other interviewees, such as Unni and Bodil, also seem to have a similar pattern of behavior. It is important to note that how they portrait themselves and how they tell their life stories might be biased, but my impression is that their stories were honest and authentic. For the individuals with a less central moral identity I have no data indicating that they engage in less moral or immoral behavior.

The findings from this study can neither support nor reject the findings from prior research, although some of the findings might indicate such a positive relationship.

### **6.3.2 Hypothesis 2: Situational Factors**

Prior research suggests that the accessibility of moral identity is a combination of two things; the centrality of moral identity and situational factors that may strengthen or weaken the accessibility of moral identity. Through the participants' descriptions about the circumstances and issues related to the decisions, five main categories of situational factors emerged from

the data set; 1) time for decision making, 2) thoughtful vs. instinctive, 3) influence from others, 4) mood, and 5) commonality vs. rarity.

### *Time for decision making*

From the first interviews there seemed to be a relationship between the time spent on (or available for) decision making and the outcome; *the proud decision tending to be longer than the regretful decision*. The length of the decision process can either indicate how much time the decision maker actually had for making the decision or the decision makers' choices with regard to time. A short decision making process does not necessarily mean that the decision maker was under time pressure, it might simply indicate how much time the decision maker chose to spend on the decision making process. Thus, the length of the process is not a situational factor unless there was time pressure involved – choosing to not spend time on the decision will belong in other categories of influences, e.g. other motivations. The challenge is that there is a gradual transition between what is real time pressure and chosen time pressure. An example of this is a hiring decision: there is a time pressure in the sense that you cannot take all the time in the world to make a decision – the applicant and the company is dependent upon knowing the decision within a certain time frame. At the same time, there is not necessarily an official time pressure; if you need a couple more days to make a decision you can have that extra time. So the relevant question is then; *how does the decision makers feel* – do they feel pressured or free with regard to time?

Unfortunately the data in this study is not detailed enough on this specific topic of time pressure. For most interviewees the short decision process seemed like a choice rather than an actual pressure, and several interviewees mentioned “not taking enough time to really think it through”. A few interviewees talked about being under time pressure, but the numbers are too small to say anything about trends in the data set. Looking at the length of the decision process in general, there is an overall trend of negative decisions being of a shorter process than the regretful ones (2/11 regretful decisions are long while 9/11 regretful decisions are short), but no trend for the proud decisions (6/11 proud decisions are long while 5/11 are short). This might indicate that when there is less time for decision making, the accessibility of moral identity is lower. On the other hand, it could also just mean that the decision maker did not think it through and that the negative outcome is due to poor decision process rather than the accessibility of moral identity. The relationship between time pressure and moral identity would be an interesting subject for future research.

### *Thoughtful vs. instinctive*

The use of instinct, intuition and gut feel in decision making is debated, but there are certainly a good amount of decisions in organizational life that are based on gut feel. If I was to evaluate what is a thoughtful and what is a distinctive decision, the categorization would be very much congruent with the time for decision making, and thus would not provide any new insights. When categorizing decisions as thoughtful or instinctive I chose to do this based on *the interviewees' own opinion* on what was thoughtful and instinctive decisions. Many of the interviewees used neither of these words describing their decisions, which mean there is not that much data on the subject.

Out of the eight decisions that the interviewees characterized as instinctive decisions, five were regretful and three were proud. The data does not suggest any relationship between instinctive decisions and outcome, neither a relationship between instinctive decisions and accessibility of moral identity. This could be interesting for future research, especially since instincts often are rooted in some deeper values and schemas, and the relationship between this and moral identity needs further exploration.

### *Influence from others*

Another category of situational factors is whether the decision process was influenced by other persons, or whether the decision maker was all alone in making the decision. This category is further divided into three different forms of influence: 1) Positive or negative pressure from others, 2) seeking or receiving advice, and 3) group think or conformity pressure. Pressure goes for both individual and group decisions, seeking or receiving advice goes only for individual decisions, and group think and conformity pressure goes only for group decisions.

When it comes to *direct pressure from other people*, there are several examples of that. Unni was in a way pressured by her boss to keep quiet about leaving her job. However, here it must also be noted that Unni kept quiet not only because she was pressured, but because she cared about her boss and she also found it the professional way of dealing with the situation, not creating too much noise in the organization. Interviewee 2 was partly pressured by others to address a topic with his boss, which had negative implications for his relationship with this person. Interviewee 5 was pressured to take a position in an organization without really wanting the position, which had negative implications for herself and the quality of her work in the organization. Last, interviewee 6 was partly pressured (or at least strongly advised) to

take part in a project even though she had a feeling that the project would not be ethically justifiable. All these examples show pressure in negative ways, and there are no examples of positive pressure in the data set. This might be because positive pressure is more often experienced as guidance, support and advice rather than pressure. Additionally, it must be noted that although all these examples of pressure resulted in negative outcomes, there are many factors influencing this relationship and that the pressure was not necessarily the reason for the regretful decisions. On the other hand, it is imaginable that pressure will affect the accessibility of moral identity, which should be researched in a deeper manner in future studies.

In *seeking and receiving advice from others*, there is no pattern in the data from this study. The same number of proud and regretful decisions was influenced by advice as not being influenced by advice. There is also no pattern to whether following or disregarding the advice leads to regretful or proud decisions. The relationship between seeking advice and accessibility of moral identity is thus unclear.

Many of the decisions in this study were made by a group of people. Without that many details about the group dynamics and the decision making process, it is hard to tell whether the decisions were influenced by group think or conformity pressure – especially since group think and conformity is hard to see for those involved. With limited time for each interview I did not have time to explore every possible situational factor in detail, so the data is limited to this extent. After analyzing all 22 decisions especially *three decisions stand out to me as possible group think situations*. Interviewee 2 described a regretful hiring decision where he and his partner were not able to think critically enough. One of the reasons for this lack of critical thinking might be their mood, which will be discussed in the next section, but another possible explanation is that they influenced each other in such a way that the accessibility of their moral identity was weakened. Another example is when Interviewee 4, together with her team, made a decision to make changes to the titles and structures in the company. In retrospect the decision did not work out and other people in the organization viewed it as a bad decision, but she explained the reasoning for making the decisions as the team wanted to make change and create something together and that they all agreed in this process. It is possible that the individuals in this group setting stimulated and influenced each other in a way that made them more narrow minded with regard to their task and goal, and thus “drowning” their moral identity. Last, Njord described a regretful hiring decision where he



and two co-workers decided to hire the “experienced outsider” rather than the younger person from within the company, and he explained that all three of them agreed on the decision. Also this decision might have been affected by group think.

#### ***Mood at time of decision***

This is discussed in Chapter 5: Findings and will therefore not be discussed in further detail here. To briefly sum up, the interviewees were *not able to remember* being in any specific mood at the time of decision, with exception of Interviewee 3 that could remember being in a very positive mood when making a regretful hiring decision. According to prior research (Wright & Bower, 1992) mood is expected to result in groundedness of decisions, where negative moods influence people to be more exact observers. For this case it is likely that the positive mood influenced the decision maker’s ability in critical thinking and exact judgments. This does not necessarily have any influence on the accessibility of his moral identity, but it is also possible that the positive mood “drowned” the moral identity in the way that it made him forget his deeper values.

#### ***Commonality or rarity***

The question of commonality or rarity can provide interesting data in several ways. First, it says a lot about the company’s culture and values, and whether there are any moral exemplars or heroes in the organization. Additionally, it tells us whether the decision was controversial or expected by others which in turn indicates *the difficulty of making the decision*. Making decisions that breaks the “normality” in organizations is expected to require a more central moral identity; while making a decision that is highly supported by the organization reduces the importance of a central moral identity. Out of the 22 decisions analyzed seven are characterized as rare and six as common, the rest are either neutral or non applicable. From the rare and common decisions there is no clear pattern related to the outcome of the decision. There are slightly more proud decisions that are rare compared to common ones, but this difference may be explained by the choice of decision – people might be more proud or likely to pick a proud decision that was “difficult but successful” rather than “easy and successful”. To conclude, the data from the interviews does not indicate a relationship between rarity/commonality and accessibility of moral identity.

### ***6.3.3 Hypothesis 3: Moral Behavior***

According to prior research, a high accessibility of moral identity should (amongst other variables) positively influence the moral decision process towards moral behavior. So the

question is whether the moral behavior of the interviewees can (partly) be explained by the accessible moral identity? This can to some degree be measured by whether morality and values was the reason for making the decision. When asking the interviewees to elaborate on why they made the decision, different categories of answers were recorded. Some people related it to values, identity, and being the “right thing to do”, while others had different motivations such as wanting change, wanting to accomplish something, impatience, fun and excitement. For example, Interviewee 2 and 3 made their proud decisions based on wanting change and wanting to accomplish something. Others, like Sigurd and Unni made their proud decisions based on “what was right”.

One way of exploring this relationship between accessibility of moral identity and moral action is to look at how many of the moral decisions were based on moral motivation. The problem is then deciding what a moral decision is. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the definition of moral behavior poses some challenges. All the proud decisions are certainly not in conflict with the interviewee’s own values, but does that mean it is moral behavior? A decision might be a proud one (and not being in conflict with the decision maker’s values) and at the same time lack moral elements – which makes it a positive decision without being a moral one. Some of the proud (or moral) decisions are not based on morality but rather other kinds of motivation. The relationship between *motivation and moral identity* should thus be explored in more detail in future research. Prior research has primarily focused on the motivational force behind moral identity, and less on how other desires and motivations can enhance or weaken the centrality of moral identity. The relationship between these variables seems to be more complex than first anticipated, and measuring the relationship involves a range of challenges.

Related to this hypothesis one could explore whether immoral behavior (when using this term I mean decision maker not acting according to his/her values) can be traced back to inaccessible moral identity? Here the findings show that this is not necessarily the case. For some of the interviewees – like interviewee 1, Interviewee 5, Interviewee 6 and Unni – their moral identity seemed to be active but other factors made them act in conflict with their own values. For example Unni, decided to not tell her co-workers about leaving the company even though she knew it was in conflict with some of her own values. The same goes for Interviewee 6 that decided to be a part of a project she had a strong feeling would not be run in an ethical manner. These findings shows that an accessible moral identity is not enough for

moral action to happen, and it also shows that even if the situational factors does not “drown” the moral identity there could be other factors making the decision maker not engage in moral behavior.

#### **6.3.4 Hypothesis 4: Enhanced Centrality of Moral Identity?**

This hypothesis was based on findings from the first six interviews where several interviewees seemed to have *been through a distinctive moral decision which further made them more morally focused and aware of their own moral identity*. Examples of this were Interviewee 4, 5 and 6 who described difficult and meaningful decisions that made them realize who they are and what is important to them. Additionally these experiences made them more focused on “doing the right thing”, “being good to others” and “knowing oneself”. This made me want to explore this relationship further.

Out of the next five interviews, three interviewees (Sigurd, Unni, and Bodil) seemed to be characterized by the same tendencies. Sigurd has been working on moral cases for decades now, and it seems to be rooted deeply in his moral identity. He also described a life changing decision, and how this has implicated his later decisions. Unni also made a life changing decision, and seems to be more concerned about ethics and existential questions after that experience. Bodil explained how she has changed as a decision maker throughout her career, and she said that she takes human aspects more into consideration now than before, and her moral identity and values seems to be the foundation for most of her decisions.

However, there are multiple uncertainties regarding this relationship between moral action and strengthening of moral identity. First of all, it is a question of “the chicken or the egg”. Are these individuals more ethically centered because of all the moral decisions they have made? Or did they make all these moral decisions because they were morally centered in the first place? Or is this an eternal circle of increasing morality, meaning moral individuals will act morally and then become even more concerned with morality and the act more morally, and so on? And if there is such a circle, is it possible to research this and see if life altering moments and decisions (turning points) can happen and evoke this circle of morality? If there is a relationship like this, knowing what might evoke this relationship and make individuals more ethically concerned could be of value both for businesses, society, and people’s personal life.

### 6.3.5 Hypothesis 5: Happiness

From the first six interviews the findings exclusively suggested that proud decisions contribute to happiness and well being for the decision maker. Additionally, this happiness was not only in the short term after the decisions were made, but the decisions seemed to be a long lasting sustainable source of happiness; whenever the decision maker thought about that decision (which was often for some of the interviewees) the decision maker would have positive emotions.

I chose to explore this relationship further in the other section of interviews, and most of the findings could support the hypothesis. However, contrary to the first findings the term “happiness” did not seem to be suitable for all cases, which made it necessary to differentiate between the different variables of PERMA (see Chapter 2 for more information on PERMA). Sigurd, for example, did not seem to feel much happiness related to his decisions (happiness in terms of the common interpretation of the term – which is typically positive emotions). When I explored this further, his decisions were more related to *meaning, engagement and achievement*, rather than positive emotions. This makes sense because of his view on happiness, but also because some of his moral behavior also resulted in personal harm. Personal harm does not evoke feelings of joy and positive emotions, but sacrificing something for the *greater good can evoke strong feelings* of e.g. meaning. Similarly, Njord did not experience long term “happiness” related to his proud decision, but certainly achievement and meaning in terms of being part of something greater than himself and achieving something important for his company. Others, like Unni, put great emphasis on positive relationships and the importance of being close to other human beings. This can sometimes involve neutral or negative emotions but still have importance for the person’s overall well-being.

To the extent to which this qualitative method can be used to measure the relationship between the variables, *the findings support the hypothesis of moral behavior being a source of long term well being and happiness*. I see this as an important finding because it provides even more support to why moral behavior is important. Not only for the individual itself; increased well-being and happiness because of moral behavior will ultimately result in more creative, productive and successful people (Achor, 2010). This has implications for how organizations should facilitate moral behavior and how to motivate their employees. This will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

## 6.4 Happiness and well-being

The interviewees experienced happiness through different components of PERMA, but which elements of PERMA were most important to the interviewees?

This study started out focusing on happiness as a more general term, and the interviewees referred to happiness mainly as positive emotions. Overall, most interviewees experienced some positive emotions related to the proud decision. Some interviewees expressed a lot of positive emotions and joy because of the successful and proud decision, but these positive emotions were often connected to the other parts of PERMA. Many were *happy because of* their achievements, a meaningful job, or positive relationships. This makes it harder to isolate the positive emotions and study them in their “pure form”, although my impression is that some of the interviewees also experienced positive emotions in a purer form. Also, this is interesting because it shows that the other components can be drivers of positive emotions, which underlines the importance of pursuing the other components rather than positive emotions in its pure form. This is in line with Seligman’s critique of hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure. Additionally, the positive emotions seemed to be less significant in the longer term – in the longer term other components of PERMA took over as the contributor to happiness and well-being.

Engagement or gratitude is the component of PERMA that were the least important to the interviewees – few interviewees mentioned gratitude or being completely engaged in a project or task. This does not necessarily mean that gratitude is of less importance, it might be explained by the other components being easier to talk about for the interviewees and easier to discover for me as a researcher. There were two clear examples of gratitude amongst the interviewees; Sigurd was grateful for the life he is living, and Unni was grateful for all the good relationships in her life. Also here the components are related to each other – Unni was grateful *because of* her positive relationships, and as I interpreted it Sigurd was grateful *because of* the possibility to pursue such a meaningful career.

Several interviewees mentioned positive relationships as important. Unni and Bodil talked openly about all the good people they are surrounded by, while Njord and Vidar talked about family as the most important thing in life. Nearness, intimacy and love from relationships seem to be of high important to the interviewees in my study.

Meaning is probably the component of PERMA that most interviewees talked about in a direct way. Every interviewee said something like “being part of something greater than myself” and “contributing to something bigger”. This might be due to the design of the interview guide, which asked more directly about meaning than some of the other elements, but this was also something most interviewees talked about several times during the interview and without me encouraging them through the interview questions. A sense of meaning seems to be one of the most important contributors to the well being of the interviewees.

The last component, achievements, contributed to both positive emotions and general well-being through the sense of accomplishing something, succeeding or winning. Not everyone talked directly about achievements, but I think because the decision was characterized as “proud” achievements played a central role – achievements tend to make people proud. For the interviewees with a less central moral identity, achievements were a more visible contributor to happiness and well being than the other components. This might be explained by meaning, gratitude and positive relationships being rooted in a deeper existential part of the self – it might be easier feeling happy because of achievements (which are usually more tangible) than the process of gratitude and pursuit of meaning.

## 6.5 Virtues

As virtues are perceived as values that are considered universally important, it might be interesting to study which virtues the interviewees in this thesis possess and consider important. To study the virtuous sides of the interviewees, it would be beneficial to have some more information about their life stories and decisions, in addition to observation of behavior. With this limited insight into their life worlds, it is difficult stating which virtues they possess and not. Because of this limited knowledge, I choose to focus this analysis solely on the behavior and thoughts in the two specific decisions analyzed in each interview. Therefore, this is not an analysis of the interviewees’ behavior in general, but their behavior in these situations. An implication of this is the risk that important character traits were not exposed due to e.g. choice of decisions for the interview.

	Sigurd Proud	Sigurd Regret	Unni Proud	Unni Regret	Njord Proud	Njord Regret	Vidar Proud	Vidar Regret	Bodil Proud	Bodil Regret
<b>Transcendence:</b> strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provides meaning	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
<b>Justice:</b> civic strengths underlie healthy community life	X	X			X	X		X	X	X
<b>Temperance:</b> Strengths that protect against excess			X	X						
<b>Courage:</b> emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal	X		X		X		X		X	
<b>Humanity:</b> interpersonal strengths that involves tending and befriending others	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
<b>Wisdom and knowledge:</b> cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge	X				X				X	X

Figure 4: Virtues from data

It is important to note that these findings are not necessarily representative for the interviewees' general behavior and being – a different choice of decisions might have given different results.

As you can see from Figure 4, the findings indicate that (not surprisingly) the interviewees practiced *fewer virtues in the regretful decisions compared to the proud decisions*. This is in line with the assumptions that practice of virtues is the key to moral behavior. There is no

clear pattern of which virtues were more related to proud vs. regretful decisions. This is probably due to the small number of decisions. Additionally, the virtues transcendence, justice and humanity were most present amongst these interviewees, and temperance and wisdom were the least present virtues. This might be a coincidence by the choice of decisions, so the relationship between virtuous behavior and moral behavior needs further research.

## 6.6 Other Findings

The following topics are not included in the Research Model, but was explored through the initial interviews and provided some interesting findings.

### 6.4.1 *Regretful Decisions: Processing and Post Mode Evaluations*

While exploring how the proud decisions influenced the decision makers' happiness, I also explored *how the regretful decision affected their happiness*. To no surprise the regretful decisions had *negative implications* on the decision makers' mood and happiness, but this seems to only be of significance for the short term. In the long term the negative decision does not have much influence because of different strategies for dealing with the problem. Overall, the interviewees' main strategy to avoid long term implications on their well being was to not think about the regretful decision, forget about it and move on. Furthermore, some interviewees processed the decision by reflecting upon it and learning from it, others chose to process it through talking to others about it, some liked to say sorry and ask for forgiveness, while others tried to make remedy by contributing in other areas. Others said that they tried to rationalize the decision to minimize their own mistake and responsibility.

Even though the focus of this thesis is on positive psychology and how moral behavior affects the happiness of the decision makers, it is important to not overlook the negative side. How does *repressing the regretful decisions* affect the moral identity of the decision maker? What will repressing feelings and memories do to you? What is better – repressing and forgetting or actually processing the decision through talking about it etc.? Repressing obviously has the function of seemingly limiting the negative emotions related to the regretful decision, but what is better in the long term? These questions were not addressed in this research model, but are important for future research on the topic.

### 6.4.2 *Male and female ethics*

As a female business student I have discovered some differences between men and women during my five years at NHH, and I thought this might apply for the process of moral decision



making as well as other aspects of business life. Additionally, there is a great gap in the number of female leaders and board members compared to the male proportion. My initial thought was that there might be some aspects of morality and moral decision making that could help explain this gap.

The number of men and women in this study is not large enough to draw conclusions about gender differences, especially since the sample is diverse when it comes to background, age, education and employment. Additionally, most of the female participants in this study had either been holding or are holding leader positions in a company, which might make them different from those women who do not take leader positions in business. Regardless of this, I find it interesting to see whether there are any tendencies towards gender differences amongst this sample of interviewees.

The women in this study talked more about morality, moral identity and values than the men. This could indicate that the women are more morally oriented or has a more central moral identity compared to the men. This could also be just a coincidence because of small sample size, or it could be that women more easily and freely talk about such topics. Another explanation to this difference could be that women open up easier, or that women open up easier towards a female researcher than men do. Overall there is not a significant difference, but there might be a slight tendency that women's moral identity is more central than that of men.

Gilligan (1982) argues that men and women have different moral orientations, meaning they see different virtues and values as important. The typical distinction that Gilligan found is that women emphasize love and care, while men emphasize fairness and justice. Overall the data from the interviews support this distinction; several of the female participants mentioned love, care and relationships as important, while several male participants mentioned fairness as important. However there are also exceptions; Sigurd talked about care as his core value and for Bodil fairness was a central value. Thus, there is no clear indication of such a difference between men and women.

#### **6.4.3 Motivation**

Another finding from this study is the relationship between moral identity and motivation. Moral identity itself has a motivational force, but what was also discovered through the interviews is that motivation might work as a situational factor influencing the process of

moral decision making. In some cases the interviewees had other motivations for making the decisions, like fun, excitement, impatience, and wanting to make change. This motivation did not necessarily “drown” the moral identity, but made them prioritize between some moral aspects and the motivation. An example of this is Interviewee 6 who decided to take part in a project that she suspected did not meet her ethical standards. She did spend time thinking through the situation and possible implications, she was concerned about a value conflict, but she decided to take part in the project anyways because “It seemed very interesting and exciting, and I thought it was an important project”.

As you can see from Figure 1 (Chapter 2), moral identity is expected to influence moral judgment and moral motivation. The motivational force of moral identity is explained in Chapter 2. One weakness of this model might be that it addresses only the moral aspects of decisions, not the overall decision making process. This model (partly) explains the process from recognizing a moral issue to acting upon it, but it does not say anything about the non-moral components such as other forms of motivation and preferences. From the model we can see that moral identity affects *moral motivation* – but what about other kinds of motivation? The findings from this study suggest that it is possible to have a strong and highly accessible moral identity and still choose to not act according to your values (e.g. Interviewee 4 and 6). This is not in line with this model, which expects an accessible moral identity to provide strong moral motivation (which should make the moral considerations more important to the individual than other desires and preferences). As Hannah et al. (2011) explains, this model is not a thoroughly studied and causal model, it is a model summing up the current research and proposing some relationships between these variables – thus, the model needs further research.

#### **6.4.4 Njord: A deviant case?**

I also feel the need to discuss a deviant finding from one of the interviews. In research much attention is dedicated to trends and patterns, but sometimes the most valuable findings are the deviations. One particular case, Njord, stood out from the others when it comes to identity – Njord was all about the company and not about himself. He was not proud because of personal reasons, but on the behalf of the company. He did not find the proud decision meaningful to himself, but meaningful to the company. And when asked about values, loyalty towards the company was one of the core values in life.

I have been reflecting upon the possible reasons of this disconnect and distance between himself as an individual and the professional Njord working for the company. Is it because of a strong sense of professionalism that he does not address personal topics? Is it because of his long experience in this industry that he has learned to be very cautious about what to share and not? Is it because he works in an industry that receives a lot of critique from media, and thus he is not sharing more than necessary? Or is it a result of a corporate culture that does not make room for individual values and thoughts? Or is the answer simply that his moral identity is not central to him? Unfortunately I do not have the answer, but the relationship between industry, corporate culture, position in the company and moral identity might be an interesting topic for future research.

#### **6.4.5 *Knowing yourself***

One of the most important findings from this study, in my opinion, is the relationship between knowing yourself and the centrality of moral identity. The interviewees with a central moral identity had *spent a lot of time reflecting upon moral issues* and existential questions such as the meaning of life and what a good life is. As discussed earlier in this chapter this could also be the other way around; that because of a central moral identity they spend time on getting to know themselves. I believe this relationship could go both ways, but through their life stories and how I experienced the interviews I think there is great potential and value in getting to know yourself.

After the interviews several interviewees expressed that they got to know themselves better through the interview and they found it interesting thinking about topics of morality that they had not been thinking about before. My impression is that many people do not spend time thinking through these issues and they are not familiar with their moral self because of that. I believe that the reason for some people having a less central moral identity might be that they have not explored their moral self yet. But if there is a positive relationship between exploring your moral self and the centrality of moral identity, and further a relationship between the centrality of moral identity and moral behavior, there is great value potential in helping people explore their moral self. If one interview helped the interviewees in getting to know themselves better, there are many initiatives and “interventions” we can make in business schools and in organizations to stimulate people to know themselves.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions

## 7.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of the moral decision making processes. In short I can conclude that this is achieved, but it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this understanding. The processes of moral decision making are complex, and more research is needed to investigate all components of the processes. Even with more research on the topic, one might not be able to dig deep into the interviewees' life worlds. This is because this topic is rooted so deeply in the existential questions of life and it touches upon some of the deepest and most private elements of people's life worlds. With this being said, I believe further research on the topic of moral decision making is fruitful. Perhaps even the small academic contribution from my thesis might be of value for humans and organizations. In this chapter I will sum up some of the findings, discuss some of the implications of these findings, and shed light on what future research might focus on.

### *7.1.1 Moral Decision Making*

My first conclusion is that we could probably delete the distinction between moral decision making and "general" decision making. Even though this distinction may have been appropriate for research purposes – enabling researchers to look at the moral components of the process – my findings from this study is that the processes of moral decision making is no different than other decision processes. Decision makers do not see the ethical issues and then choose a different decision process than what they normally do – they treat the ethical part of the decision as a part of the overall decision. Additionally, one could argue that all (or at least most) decisions have moral components, and that the degree to which a person perceives the decision as a value conflict is dependent upon the person's moral sensitivity and moral identity.

Closing this distinction between moral decision making and general decision making might be fruitful because a model purely based on the moral components of the decision process excludes other explanations to why decision makers act like they do. The limitations of a purely moral decision model became clear when analyzing the data from this study; in some cases the interviewee had a central moral identity and also an accessible moral identity, but ended up making a regretful decision because of other factors like preferences and motivation.

It seems like morality is a part of the self that cannot be excluded from certain decisions, as well as morality is a part of every decision – there are always some moral aspects to consider. Thus, the need for a more *holistic approach* to (moral) decision making is needed to better explain and understand human behavior related to moral issues.

## 7.2 Research Questions

To conclude what we might have learned from this study, I will elaborate on three of my research questions.

### ***7.2.1 How does moral identity affect decision making?***

The process of moral decision making is complex and this study does not provide enough data to conclude any causal relationships between the variables. The most difficult part of the research is accessibility of moral identity, because there are many different variables that possibly influence the accessibility. Based on the findings, moral decisions take place under many different circumstances, there was no clear pattern between situational factors and moral behavior. Despite these issues, the overall findings are that the centrality of moral identity seems to be of importance for moral decision making and moral behavior; people with a central moral identity make moral decisions more often than people with a less central moral identity.

### ***7.2.2 How does moral behavior affect the moral identity of a person?***

The findings from this study indicate that moral behavior is related to a central moral identity. Which way the causality in this relationship goes is not clear, but it is likely to go both ways. Thus, moral behavior might confirm and strengthen the centrality of moral identity, and a central moral identity will lead to more moral behavior. The findings also indicate that certain decisions, typically major decisions in life that represent turning points or big changes, are in particular of importance to the moral identity. Such decisions will guide decisions made later on. But how does immoral decisions and behavior affect a person's moral identity? My study does not answer this question, but this could be an interesting question for further research.

### ***7.2.3 And how does moral decision making influence the decision makers' happiness?***

As also discussed in Chapter 6, one of the main and unambiguous findings is that moral behavior (defined as acting according to your own values) through decision making can be a sustainable long term source of happiness and well being. Moral behavior leads to long term

happiness in different ways; sometimes through positive emotions and other times through engagement, relationships, meaning or achievements. Knowing what influences people's well being, is valuable for its own sake (we want people to be happy!), but it is also valuable for organizations because there are several positive implications of happy employees. Research has shown (Achor, 2010) that happy people are more productive, creative and willing to contribute more to the organization – overall they are more successful. Thus, happy people might increase the profitability, productivity and innovations of the business.

### **7.3 Implications and recommendations**

First, if moral behavior leads to long term happiness for the decision maker this has major implications on the importance of morality. This relationship between moral behavior and happiness and well-being is important for each individual – being happy is of great value to each person and is therefore of great value to society. For businesses, this relationship is important too because happy people (happy workers) have great impact on the business. Research has shown that happy people are more productive, creative and successful – which will affect the profitability and the results of the business. The fact that businesses could gain from facilitating moral behavior amongst their employees is important for moving businesses towards more ethical and sustainable practices – taking responsibility and making moral decisions does not have to be a trade off for the business, but rather an advantage (Ims & Pedersen, 2015). If ethics can be seen as an advantage rather than a trade off in terms of profitability, this would be an important step for business ethics.

My recommendation is that organizations should not be afraid of hiring people with strong moral identity and idealistic morality. These people will contribute with great value if they are motivated and encouraged to act according to their own values. Organizations should put more emphasis on values and ethics, give room for moral decisions, and support employees that engage in moral behavior. Creating an organizational culture with room for the deeper questions might be fruitful.

The second implication is related to the relationship between moral identity and moral behavior. If a central and accessible moral identity motivates moral behavior, more focus should be given towards people's moral identity. The findings from this study indicate a positive relationship between knowing yourself and the centrality of your moral identity – the interviewees that had spent more time reflecting upon morality, meaning and existential

questions, had a stronger moral identity. This might indicate that knowing yourself is a key to a central moral identity.

If knowing yourself leads to a central moral identity which in turn leads to moral behavior that ultimately leads to many positive implications, there is one easy and important thing organizations should do: encourage and help people get to know themselves. Morality is a part of every individual, but not everyone is used to thinking about existential and moral questions. Stimulating employees to get to know themselves better can be of great value to the company. This can be done through ethics training e.g. in seminars, meetings, or as a part of team building and social events. Ethics training is not only important in organizations, it is important everywhere. This kind of ethics training should be a part of schooling, especially business schools. Students should be encouraged to get familiar with their moral identity and stimulating their awareness of their deeper values.

## **7.4 What does it mean to know yourself?**

As one of the main findings is that knowing yourself is the key to a more central moral identity and moral behavior, a central question in this context is; what does knowing yourself really mean?

Different philosophers may argue differently on this question, but the overall view is that knowing yourself is related to the ability to introspect. Introspection is the examination of one's own thoughts, impressions, feelings, sensations, etc. – sometimes referred to as self-examination. Socrates argues that knowing yourself involves knowing your own limitations, knowing your strengths and weaknesses. This is also related to control over the self and the ability to curb yourself – based on your knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses and your knowledge on who you are and who you want to be, you will curb yourself to act within these limitations. An example of this from my findings is Unni, who curbs her own aspirations for power, influence and ambitions to give up her position in the company to the benefit of the company and the other leader. Unni chose to curb some of her desires to follow a different path – a path she felt was right for herself and the company.

But is knowing your limitations enough? As discussed earlier, Njord had a more distant relationship in how he sees himself as an individual in relation to the company he is working for – which might be explained by a less central moral identity. Based on how Njord saw himself and his values in relation to the company, his introspection abilities may be perceived

as low. However, Njord was aware of his own limitations, strengths and weaknesses. When talking about what he has learned from his decisions in life the most important learning points was “I have learned the importance of sometimes realizing that others can do this job better than me, and thus the importance of making room for others”. This indicates that Njord is not necessarily lacking the ability of introspection although moral sensitivity and moral identity is not perceived as strong. So one interesting question to ask is whether introspection can be divided into different levels or categories? Is it possible to know yourself on some topics and abilities and not on others? I think the answer to this question is “yes” – even if you know your strengths and weaknesses you most likely don’t know all the aspects of the self. Even with some introspection you have probably not explored all elements of the self, or all your identities. This complicates the relationship between knowing yourself and a central moral identity, because it seems like for moral identity to be centralized you have to know more about the moral part of yourself – your values, purpose, meaning and goals in life. You have to know *who you are* rather than your abilities and limitations. And equally important, you have to know *who you want to be*.

Charles Taylor puts emphasis on knowing yourself in relation to others; “[M]y discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others.” (Taylor, 1994). We do not exist in vacuums – we are formed by interaction with others and mirror ourselves in others. As Taylor argues, knowing yourself involves seeking feedback and confirmation from others, whether directly or indirectly. If you do not seek feedback and try to know yourself through others, your introspection might end up simply being your own evaluations of yourself – not necessarily grounded in reality.

*“To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.”* – Charles Taylor (1992)

I interpret two important implications from this quote of Charles Taylor; 1) to know yourself is to act morally – to determine what is right and wrong, and 2) what is right and wrong is determined within a frame or horizon, meaning what is morally right is not only determined by your own evaluations but a broader horizon of morality. The first point underlines the main



finding of my study; morality and knowing yourself are closely related. The second point underlines the weakness of my definition of morality, because moral behavior is more than just acting according to your own values – it also involves taking the situation and some universal values into consideration. According to Taylor (1992), Moral behavior is acting according to your own values *within the horizon of what is commonly considered important values*. This leads us to the next question; what are universally considered important values?

One possible answer to this question is through the seven cardinal virtues (see Chapter 2: Literature Study for more on Virtue Theory), which have been considered the most important values or character qualities over a long period of time and across different cultures. The seven cardinal virtues are; prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity. A virtue that might be particularly related to knowing yourself is temperance, or moderation. Moderation requires an understanding of one's limitations and the strength to control your desires. Although justice is sometimes considered the most important virtue of all, Plato considered moderation (or Sophrosyne, as he called it) the most important virtue. Temperance is important in everything you do and in every decision you make, and is often expressed through other characteristics (or virtues) such as chastity, modesty, humility, prudence, self-regulation, forgiveness and mercy; each of these involves restraining an excess of some kind. The other six virtues are also important, because they represent characteristics that are necessary for moral behavior. Earlier I argued, based on the findings from my study, that in order to act morally you need to know yourself. Taylor (1992) argues that when you are acting morally that is when you know yourself. Whether these two arguments are supporting each other or differing in terms of the direction of the relationship is unclear, but what is most likely certain is that there is a relationship between knowing yourself, moral identity and moral behavior.

This view is supported by Ims' (2006) triangle of responsibility, where the decision maker has to consider their professional responsibility, personal responsibility and common morality. Thus, moral behavior cannot be isolated to only include one's personal values – as decision makers we are a part of a broader system of stakeholders that are dependent upon and affected by each other's actions. This is what makes morality an issue in the first place; this interdependence makes it necessary to not only follow our desires – we need to consider the implications on others.

So to conclude – what does knowing yourself mean? And how can you get to know yourself better? Knowing yourself requires *introspection and self-examination*. However, knowing your limitations, strengths and weaknesses is not necessarily equivalent with knowing the moral part of the self. Thus, in order to get to know your moral self, the self-examination or introspection needs a more *existential focus*. Who am I? Who do I want to be? What is meaningful for a good life for me? What are my goals in life? What are the most important values and virtues to me? Some of these questions were asked in my interviews for this thesis. I could clearly see that some of the interviewees had already spent time on their own thinking about some of these questions, while some interviewees were “less prepared” for that kind of questions. Despite this difference, most interviewees pointed out after the interview that they found the questions interesting, that they were glad they got the chance to think through some of these topics and that they got to know themselves a little better from the interview. First, this shows that the reason why many people do not think about the existential questions of life is not necessarily lack of interest or motivation, but rather lack of time or focus on such topics. Second, this shows that it might be easy helping people to get to know their moral self – an interview with a researcher was all it took.

From personal experience from professor Ims’ business ethics classes, I also think the use of *ethical dilemmas* and *role play* can be fruitful measures to help people in knowing their moral self. Ethical dilemmas are sometimes efficient because they force you to take a stand in extreme cases, choosing between conflicting values. The internal debate in order to take a stand forces you to think through which values are most important to you. Role play can help people to get to know themselves through exercise of empathy. Exercise of empathy will not only increase your moral sensitivity (Poorman, 2002); through others you also know yourself. Placing yourself in someone else’s shoes through role play and empathy can help understand yourself as well as others. How you react and how you feel in certain roles and situations might provide information about yourself.

Knowing yourself is not only important for the sake of a central moral identity or more frequent moral behavior; by knowing yourself you also know others. Through awareness of self you will be more aware of others, have more empathy and a deeper understanding for other peoples life projects. Knowing yourself is important in meetings with others; when you see yourself – that is when you can really see others.

Every human being is a universe of meaning – we are ambiguous creatures. Our life worlds are complex, and we can never achieve complete introspection. If it is not possible to know every element of the self – how can we fully understand others? There are limits to how deep we can hope to sig into people’s life worlds and how deep we can expect to understand others. This is a limitation for future research on the topic. Practically it poses challenges because one cannot expect to understand every aspect of another person through an interview. This is due to time constrains, the relationship between researcher and research subject (who are strangers), and the fact that the interviewee most likely does not know every element of his or her moral identity. Further, how can we expect to deeply understand others if we do not fully understand ourselves? And how can we expect to fully understand others if they do not know themselves – how can they communicate what they do not know?

This topic of knowing yourself was introduced by Socrates and has been studied for thousands of years. This is an enigmatic topic, and to gain a complete understanding of humans is unlikely. On the other hand, it is a deep and important topic and I think further research on moral identity and knowing yourself can be fruitful.

One finding from this thesis and previous research on happiness is that positive emotions (or hedonics) have limitations with regard to its potential contributions to people’s long term happiness. Related to this is positive emotions impact on self understanding and introspection. A person dominated by positive emotions will most likely get a flat impression of reality, and thus a flat impression of the self. Deep introspection requires investigation of all sides of life, not only the positive ones. Additionally, as Wright and Bower (1992) argues, for critical and thorough thinking to take place the state of mind should be slightly negative – positive emotions influences our abilities to think clear and exact. This underlines the limitations of positive emotions and why we should rather emphasize engagement, meaning, relationships and achievements.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed different ways to get you know yourself better, like asking existential questions, solving ethical dilemmas and engaging in role play. Some people argue that the only way to deeply understand ourselves is through literature – through learning to know others through empathy and imagination. Literature can enhance your ability to feel empathy, and through knowing and understanding different characters you might understand more of yourself too. There are many examples of literary works that focus on the existential questions of life. One important contribution on this field is Henrik Ibsen’s Peer Gynt, where

Peer asks the question “What does it mean to be yourself?”. The relationship between literature, knowing yourself and moral identity might be interesting for future research. How can literature and fiction be used as a tool to get to know yourself? I think that we can all learn about ourselves from studying both Socrates and Peer Gynt.

## 7.5 Future research

Throughout this thesis I have discussed limitations of my research and suggestions for further research. These suggestions can be summed up into three possible directions for where to go next.

First, to study moral behavior and decision making I think it is necessary to have a more precise definition and concept of moral behavior. What is moral behavior? As I have discussed this question in my thesis I have found that there is no clear answer to this, but two main components have emerged; moral behavior is 1) acting according to your own values 2) within a horizon of universally important values. This proposed definition needs deeper examination, in addition to deeper investigation on what are the most important universal values. Which values and virtues do people consider most important? Do people agree on this, or are there differences with regard to gender, age, culture, etc.?

Second, more research on what it means to know yourself and how this influences the centrality of moral identity might be fruitful. There seems to be a relationship between the two variables, but deeper and more systematic research is needed to get a more holistic understanding of this relationship.

My last suggestion for future research is to focus more on all four dimensions of the decisions; the existential, systemic, social, and technical dimensions (Mitroff, 1998). My thesis studied mainly the existential perspective of the interviewee’s decisions, which was a natural consequence of my focus on happiness and identity. For example it could be interesting to ask the interviewees how they see their decisions in light of all four dimensions. This might provide more data on the interviewee’s ethical sensitivity and moral identity, in addition to a deeper understanding of how the interviewee makes judgments and priorities in their decision making processes.

Throughout this research I have gotten to know myself and my identity better, and this is also true for most of my interviewees. I hope that this thesis can inspire some of you to explore

yourselves on a deeper level and that you through making good decisions will experience happiness and well being.

Thank you.

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# Appendix

## INTERVIEW GUIDE I

I would like our conversation to be based on two decisions/choices you have made in an organizational or business context. I would like one of the decisions to be a decision you look back on with pride (Decision 1), and the second one a decision you consider regretful (Decision 2). It is advantageous if the decisions are quite "fresh", preferably made during the past three weeks, and the decisions should be of such an importance for you that you remember the details and can reflect upon them. If you need to prioritize between important and recent, I wish that you choose an important rather than recent decision. And last, it would be even more interesting if the decisions are of a moral character - i.e. conflicting values. These are not meant as criteria, but rather guidelines, so do not worry if you cannot find any decisions that match all these guidelines - any decision will be interesting to discuss.

### Two important decisions:

- What makes you proud of the proud decision?
- What is regretful about the other decision?
- Are there any similarities between the two decisions?
- Are there any differences between the two decisions?
- Why did you decide to do that (in the proud decision)?
- Why did you decide to do that (in the regretful decision)?
- Can you please describe the decision processes for the two decisions?
  - o E.g. difficult, long, advice, uncertainty, etc.

### Mood:

- Were you in any specific mood when you made the decisions?
  - o And how do you think this might have influenced the decisions?

### Moral aspects:

- Was there any value conflicts related to the decisions? Any moral issues?

### Post mode evaluation:

- For the proud decision:
  - o How did you experience making a decision like that?
  - o What does it mean to you?
  - o Did it have implications on your mood?
  - o Was it important just at the moment or in the longer term?
- For the regretful decision:
  - o How did you experience making a decision like that?
  - o Did you feel the need to process the decision afterwards? If so – how?
  - o Did it have implications on your mood?
- How did you experience the overall implications of the decisions?

# INTERVIEW GUIDE II

I would like our conversation to be based on two decisions/choices you have made in an organizational or business context. I would like one of the decisions to be a decision you look back on with pride (Decision 1), and the second one a decision you consider regretful (Decision 2). It is advantageous if the decisions are quite "fresh", preferably made during the past three weeks, and the decisions should be of such an importance for you that you remember the details and can reflect upon them. If you need to prioritize between important and recent, I wish that you choose an important rather than recent decision. And last, it would be even more interesting if the decisions are of a moral character - i.e. conflicting values. These are not meant as criteria, but rather guidelines, so do not worry if you cannot find any decisions that match all these guidelines - any decision will be interesting to discuss.

## TWO IMPORTANT DECISIONS

1. What makes you proud of the positive decision?
2. What do you see as regretful in the other decision?
3. Are there any *similarities* between the two decisions?
4. Are there any *differences* between the two decisions?

## SITUATIONAL FACTORS

### For the regretful decision:

5. Was it difficult for you making the decision?
6. Do you understand why you made that decision at that time?
7. Looking back on that decision, are you surprised that you made that decision?
8. Did you talk to anyone about the decision?
9. Did you feel support for making the decision?

### Positive/proud decision:

10. Was it difficult for you making the decision?
11. Did you talk to anyone about the decision?
12. Did you feel support for making the decision?
13. Do you know of others (in your organization) that have done the same?
14. Do you think it is common to make this kind of decisions (in your organization)?

## **MORAL BEHAVIOR → HAPPINESS**

### **For the proud decision:**

15. What does that decision mean to you?
16. Has it influenced your mood? Short term and long term?
17. And why do you think this is?

## **MORAL BEHAVIOR → STRENGTHENING CENTRALITY OF MORAL IDENTITY**

### **For the proud decision:**

18. How are you different today from what you were in your past when it comes to making decisions?
19. Do you think the implications of the decision have changed how you make decisions?
20. Do you think that decision has influenced decision you made later on?
21. Has it influenced how you see yourself? What have you learned about yourself from this decision?
22. Has it influenced how you feel about making decisions like that?
23. Has it made it easier or more difficult to make (similar) decisions?

### **For the regretful decision:**

24. What have you learned about yourself from this decision?
25. Do you think the implications of the decision have affected how you make decisions?
26. Do you think that decision has influenced decision you made later on?
27. Has it influenced how you feel about making decisions like that?
28. Has it made it easier or more difficult to make (similar) decisions?
29. Has it influenced how you see yourself?

## **CENTRALITY OF MORAL IDENTITY**

### **Goals and Life narratives: (meaning and purpose in life)**

30. What have you learned from these decisions?
31. Have you learned anything about what is important for a good life for you?
32. (What do you see as important for a good life?)
33. How do you see these decisions in relation to your goals in life?

Note: the hypotheses was not included on the interview guide that I sent to the interviewees.

## INTERVIEWEES

<b>Nr (chron.)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>New Name</b>
1	M	40's	Norwegian	In person	Interviewee 1
2	M	20's	Norwegian	In person	Interviewee 2
3	M	20's	Norwegian	In person	Interviewee 3
4	F	40's	Norwegian	In person	Interviewee 4
5	F	20's	Norwegian	In person	Interviewee 5
6	F	30's	Norwegian	FaceTime, no recording	Interviewee 6
7	M	50's	American	In person	Sigurd
8	F	40's	Norwegian	In person	Unni
9	M	50's	Norwegian (in America)	FaceTime, no recording	Njord
10	M	30's	American	FaceTime	Vidar
11	F	50's	Norwegian	Phone	Bodil

