

Moral Repair in the Workplace: A Qualitative Investigation and Inductive Model

Jerry Goodstein¹ · Ken Butterfield² · Nathan Neale²

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Abstract The topic of moral repair in the aftermath of breaches of trust and harming has grown in importance within the past few years. In this paper, we present the results of a qualitative study that offers insight into a series of key issues related to offender efforts to repair interpersonal harm in the workplace: (1) What factors motivate offenders to make amends with those they have harmed? (2) In what ways do offenders attempt to make amends? (3) What outcomes emerge from attempts to make amends? Drawing from the findings, we build an inductive model intended to guide future business ethics and management inquiry and research in this area.

Keywords Moral repair · Interpersonal harm · Making amends · Forgiveness · Qualitative research

Introduction

Walker (2006) used the term “moral repair” to refer to the responses of individuals, organizations, and the state—whether offender, target, or other—to wrongdoing and

harm. According to Walker, when moral relationships have been violated, moral repair (among offender, target, and community stakeholders) is needed to sustain confidence and hope in shared ethical standards within a community and restore trust that individuals and institutions will honor these standards and reproach those who undermine them. Radzik (2009, p. 141) challenged ethics scholars to consider an overlooked perspective on moral repair in the aftermath of wrongdoing,

The literature in ethics is filled with theories of what makes an action wrong, what makes an actor responsible and blameworthy for her wrongful actions, and what one is justified in doing to wrongdoers (e.g., may one punish them? must one forgive them?). However, there is relatively little discussion of what wrongdoers themselves must do in the aftermath of their wrongful acts. Moral philosophers usually discuss wrongdoing from the point of view of either a judge or a victim, but almost never from the point of view of a wrongdoer. As a result, wrongdoers are treated as people who must be handled in some way, rather than as moral agents who are capable of appropriate and meaningful responses.

One of the most important of these responses is making amends (e.g., Goodstein and Butterfield 2010). Walker (2006, p. 191) defines amends as “...intentionally reparative actions by parties who acknowledge responsibility for wrong, and whose reparative actions are intended to redress that wrong.” One who makes amends seeks to repair damaged relationships with those harmed, the broader workplace, and oneself. This involves taking reparative actions (e.g., expressing remorse, apologizing, compensating the victim) with the intention to make amends that are perceived as meaningful by those who have been

✉ Jerry Goodstein
jgoodstein@vancouver.wsu.edu

Ken Butterfield
kdb@wsu.edu

Nathan Neale
nathan.neale@wsu.edu

¹ Department of Management, Information Systems, and Entrepreneurship, Washington State University Vancouver, Vancouver, WA, USA

² Department of Management, Information Systems, and Entrepreneurship, Washington State University, Pullman, WA, USA

harmed (Morrison 2006; Ren and Gray 2009; Walker 2006). While these reparative gestures may not relieve the victim of all costs (whether emotional, material, or moral), Radzik (2007, 2009) and Walker (2006) argue that they do matter a great deal and communicate to the victim and others that the offender does have an understanding of the harm done to the victim and broader community.

Within the past few years, there have been a number of conceptual efforts to explore the making of amends in response to a number of forms of wrongdoing—interpersonal conflict (Ren and Gray 2009), broken trust (Bottom et al. 2002; Gibson et al. 1999; Kim et al. 2004, 2006), and in the aftermath of unethical behavior (Goodstein and Butterfield 2010). These models draw attention to the importance of the offender taking actions such as apologizing or offering some form of compensation to victims, in motivating forgiveness by victims and third parties and regaining the trust and respect of those directly and indirectly harmed. With a few exceptions (Bottom et al. 2002; Kim et al. 2004, 2006) this offender-centered work has generally not been empirical in nature.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this developing literature in the business ethics and management literatures through studying offenders and their efforts to make amends and repair workplace relationships damaged by interpersonal transgressions. We employ the term “relationships” broadly, explicitly including relationships with others (e.g., target, co-workers, supervisor) as well as one’s relationship with oneself. Even after offenders have taken steps to make amends with those they have harmed, there remains the challenge of self-repair and regaining self-respect (Dillon 1997, 2001).

Because the topic of making amends represents relatively uncharted empirical territory, particularly with respect to the offender’s perspective, we employed an inductive qualitative research design that allowed us to address a core set of research questions: (1) what factors motivate offenders to make amends with those they have harmed? (2) In what ways do offenders attempt to make amends? (3) What outcomes emerge from attempts to make amends (e.g., for the offender, target, or co-workers)? We draw on our empirical findings to develop a conceptual model that we believe can facilitate a better understanding of the social and emotional dynamics of making amends in organizations and serve to guide future theoretical and empirical work by business ethics and management scholars.

Understanding the dynamics of making amends and gaining insight into the questions posed above has important normative implications, in particular for the domain of business ethics. From a utilitarian perspective, to the extent that making amends can enable the repair of workplace relationships and rebuild trust, there is the potential to

enhance individual, group, and firm performances (Kidder 2007; Ren and Gray 2009). In business organizations, the quality of interpersonal relationships and building team cohesiveness and trust are critical, particularly in individual or group negotiations (Gibson et al. 1999) and in situations where individuals are working in teams with high levels of interdependence (Ren and Gray 2009). With regard to deontological considerations, drawing greater attention to the topic of making amends opens up avenues for more inquiry into what it means for someone working in a business context to be a moral agent and to act responsibly. While management and business ethics scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to considerations of agency and responsibility in situations where it is others who have caused harm, as in the case of whistleblowing (DeGeorge 2013; Gundlach et al. 2003), far less attention has been directed to agency and responsibility when it is we who have caused harm. Finally, making amends has important ethical implications by virtue of being a critical part of a broader process, involving forgiveness and reintegration, by which individuals in business organizations who have caused harm to others can restore their personal integrity (Goodstein and Butterfield 2010; Radzik 2009).

We take up these questions following a brief overview of the normative literature on moral repair and making amends, and related literatures that have explored relationship repair within organizational contexts. We then present the qualitative research design we employed to address the questions outlined above and the key findings from our analysis. Drawing from the findings, we then build an inductive model intended to highlight the contributions of our study and guide future research in this area.

Theoretical Background

Religious Foundations

The topic of making amends is part of a broader discussion of the process of atonement, in which the offender seeks reconciliation with the victim and reintegration back into good standing with other members of the community (Garvey 1999). Discussions of atonement have strong religious roots, in particular emphasizing the offender’s reconciliation with God (Jung 2010; Roberts 2007; Sharp 2011). From a theological perspective, a transgression or sin has damaged the relationship between the sinner and God, “Sin separated the sinner from that which the sinner identified himself—God—and thus from himself” (Garvey 1999, p. 1809). Atonement represents the process by which the individual who has sinned is returned to the status of being “at one” with God (Sharp 2011, p. 155). This

process is one that from both a Christian and Jewish religious perspective requires a reorientation towards God to receive God's mercy and forgiveness, "the focus of atonement in Biblical Theology is the forgiveness of sins—it is the turning of God's wrath away from the sin of man and woman" (Sharp 2011, p. 155).

Atonement calls for both contrition and expiation. Contrition is sincere sorrow for having offended God, and hatred for the sins we have committed, with a firm purpose of sinning no more. Contrition is the act of standing before God and recognizing one's own turpitude...My wrongdoing is on display before God. There is at once no hope in me by myself. It is only in my acknowledgement before a righteous and forgiving God that my contrition can be recognized as a step toward redemption (Jung 2010, p. 287).

As Roberts notes, contrition takes one beyond feelings of guilt to a recognition of God as merciful (Roberts 2007, p. 103).

Contrition is closely connected to the notion of expiation which is represented in a variety of forms with the Jewish and Christian religious traditions such as practices of sacrifice, or the taking of communion and the practice of confession in the Catholic faith. Expiation in its religious sense is, "a kind of cleansing or purification, a removal of guilt from one's soul" (Radzik 2009, p. 5). Within the Jewish faith, this kind of "cleansing of one's soul" takes place during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) (Sharp 2011), a day of both prayer, asking for forgiveness, and sacrifice through fasting. Expiation plays an important role in the Christian faith as well. Within the Roman Catholic tradition in particular, expiation takes place through participation in Christ's sacrifice (Garvey 1999; Hutter 2011), e.g., through practices such as communion, in which Christ takes on the sins of humanity and through his sacrifice cleanses and heals the souls of those who have sinned.

Philosophical Foundations

Where theological accounts of making amends emphasize God as the object of one's identification and actions, secular accounts (Garvey 1999; Radzik 2009; Swinburne 1989) take as the object of identification and action the offender's community and in particular the "shared sense of identity among the members—wrongdoers and victims alike—of the community" (Garvey 1999, p. 1810). There are important secular foundations for discussions of atonement, and specifically the making of amends by the offender (Garvey 1999; Radzik 2009; Swinburne 1989). An important stream of this secular work is philosophically grounded. Gibson et al. (1999) identify a number of

philosophers who take up the topics of atonement and the making of amends in the context of discussions of punishment and forgiveness following harmdoing. Locke for example argued that punishment, within limits and in proportion to the transgression, might guide social interaction and "may make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and by his example others, from doing the like mischief (Locke 1955, p. 6). Mackie connects punishment to atonement, and more specifically expiation wherein "the suffering of the penalty absorbs and wipes out the guilt" (Mackie 1982, p. 271). Kant (1983) focused less on the role of punishment and suggested that reconciliation and atonement were grounded in a kind of moral duty that is reciprocated when those harmed fulfill their duty to consider forgiveness and undertake "a sincere attempt to give the other party the opportunity to break the potential escalation of animosity" (Gibson et al. 1999, p. 72).

More contemporary scholars adopting a secular and philosophical perspective suggest that making amends involves a number of key actions on the part of the offender: repenting, which involves an explicit acknowledgment of responsibility; apologizing; making reparations, which involves some form of restitution or compensation for harm; and undergoing some form of penance (Garvey 1999; Radzik 2009; Swinburne 1989). Radzik (2009, p. 146) suggests that an intended outcome of making amends is to,

bring the relationship that was harmed back into harmony...This kind of reconciliation, then, involves the restoration or establishment of a civil relationship between the parties. The victim will have good reason to give up his resentment, fear, and distrust of the wrongdoer. Each will now expect to be treated as a member in good standing in the moral community, even if they choose to become strangers to one another in the future.

For Walker (2006), making amends is a fundamental component of moral repair. Walker suggests that when relationships have been violated, moral repair among offender, target, and community stakeholders is needed to restore trust and sustain confidence in shared ethical standards within a community. For offenders, moral repair primarily involves making amends, for targets through extending forgiveness to the offender, and for the community moral repair is achieved through supporting the target while providing the opportunity to reintegrate the offender back into the community. Walker (2007, p. 196) points to the "ordinariness of a familiar stock of reparative gestures and practices" that people employ to make amends in cases of wrongdoing such as verbal apologies and other offers of amends such as "service, repayment, replacement, or other compensation."

Related Management Work

Within the management literature, the topic of making amends has been integrated into a number of streams of work. The concession literature (Gonzales et al. 1992; Schonbach 1990; Tata 2000) has long drawn attention to cognitive, affective, and relational factors that motivate individuals to make amends. With regard to cognitive influences, the employee's perceptions of accountability (Gonzales et al. 1992; Mikula 1994; Schonbach 1990; Tavuchis 1991; Walker 2006), attributions of responsibility and causality (Weiner et al. 1991), the intentionality of the transgression, and the severity of the offense (Gonzales et al. 1992) represent important cognitive influences on whether employees will concede wrongdoing and take additional steps such as expressing regret and making amends.

Guilt and shame (Radzik 2009; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Taylor 1985) are among the most significant affective influences on the behavior of the offender. Tangney and Dearing (2002) distinguish between guilt, which involves an appraisal of an action's wrongness (i.e., "What I did"), from shame, which involves more global evaluations of the self (i.e., "Who I am"). Radzik (2009, p. 144) suggests why guilt and shame are such central emotions to the process of making amends,

...guilt and shame are frequently perfectly appropriate reactions to wrongdoing...The painful nature of such emotions shows that we do not simply judge ourselves negatively but also care about those negative judgments. We care about the fact that we have wronged another person, fallen short of our principles, or adopted the wrong principles and so earned our fellows' mistrust. In order legitimately to let go of our negative self-regarding attitudes, we need to earn a positive reevaluation of our moral standing. We need to fulfill our obligations to those we have harmed, reform our behaviors and characters, and communicate our respect and renewed commitment to morality to our fellows. In order to merit self-forgiveness and our own reconciliation, we must properly atone.

Empirical research (e.g., Giner-Soralla et al. 2008; Hareli and Eisikovits 2006) suggests that both guilt and shame can motivate offenders to make amends with victims through apology (Tangney and Dearing 2002) and direct compensation (Hareli et al. 2005). Feelings of guilt indicate that the offender accepts responsibility for an undesirable act and expressions of guilt, e.g., offering to compensate a victim, signal awareness of what has been violated and an intention to avoid further violations (Hareli and Eisikovits 2006). The expression of shame, e.g., through an apology, also represents an attempt by the

offender to restore the relationship through lowering his status and in a sense "equalizing" the status between offender and victim (Hareli and Eisikovits 2006).

Finally, empathy, defined in terms of an ability to share in the emotions of others is an important influence that can also motivate offenders to make amends (Batson et al. 2007; Kanov et al. 2004; Mikula 1994; Radzik 2009). Muller et al. (2014, p. 2) write that empathy is a response that is oriented towards others, "...elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of a person in need". They go on to note that, "The other-directed reparative action tendencies associated with empathy stem from appraisals of how others are affected by their plight..." (Muller et al. 2014, p. 2). In the context of interpersonal harmdoing, Radzik (2009, p. 151) writes,

In order to achieve reconciliation, the wrongdoer must know whom he has harmed and in what ways...He must imagine what sorts of responses are most likely to heal these relationships, and in order to do that he must imagine what it is like to be this victim, what it is like to be wronged in this way, how a third-party spectator is likely to be affected by the wrong, and how these parties would likely be affected by various acts of atonement. Performing all these tasks well requires empathy.

Mikula (1994) found that the importance of the relationship to the offender, which may heighten the potential for empathy, increases the likelihood of offenders conceding wrongdoing and taking steps to make amends with those they have harmed.

More recently, scholars have devoted increasing attention to the topic of relationship repair (Dirks et al. 2009; Ren and Gray 2009). Common to this interpersonal repair work is a process that most fundamentally involves taking restorative action (Ren and Gray 2009) i.e., making amends in the form of providing accounts, extending a formal apology, expressing concern, and undertaking penance of some form (e.g., restitution to the target, suffer punitive consequences). These actions are posited to restore trust and integrity (Goodstein and Butterfield 2010; Tomlinson and Mayer 2009), reduce perceptions of perceived injustice (Goodstein and Butterfield 2010; Ren and Gray 2009), and enhance the willingness of the parties to re-establish positive working relationships going forward (Ren and Gray 2009). Gibson et al. (1999) for example explored the effects of both substantive and symbolic amends in a negotiation context. They found that while substantive amends, both larger and small, did enhance the likelihood of cooperation in the aftermath of a defection, symbolic gestures such as authentically communicating regret mattered to the wronged party and contributed to maintaining the cooperative relationship.

Making Amends with Oneself

An important but neglected component of repairing interpersonal relationships damaged by wrongdoing is the process of making amends with oneself, specifically with regard to restoring self-respect and confidence in one's integrity. A number of writers have acknowledged that the process of repair is not necessarily completed after an offender has been able to earn forgiveness from others. Radzik (2009, p. 147) argues that,

Forgiveness may repair the wrongdoer's relationships with others, but it may not yet restore her view of herself as an equally valuable moral person...She must also make it the case that she can view herself as someone who is likely to perform morally good actions in the future.

Dillon (1997, 2001) has picked up on this theme in writing about restoring self-respect in the aftermath of harming others. She notes the importance of making amends as fulfilling an important responsibility to those harmed by wrongdoing, "But after that's over, there remains the task of dealing responsibly with oneself, and that is the task of self-forgiveness. Important questions remain to be settled: How shall I think of myself now? How shall I go on from here?" (Dillon 2001, p. 79). Dillon suggests that in harming others, individuals are susceptible to self-reproach,

One sees not only one's past conduct as wrong or terrible but also some aspect of one's self revealed in the conduct as undesirable, faulty, tainted, perhaps dreadful or rotten, and so one regards oneself as a lesser person, perhaps a worthless one" (Dillon 2001, pp. 63–64).

Self-forgiveness represents a reparative response to self-condemnation that potentially limits the likelihood of self-alienation or a destructive self-punishment and sustains important personal values commitments (Dillon 2001; Fisher and Exline 2006; Holmgren 1998; Snow 1993). Enright (1996, p. 115) specifically defines self-forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon self-restraint in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love towards oneself." Holmgren (1998) suggests that self-forgiveness involves a process that leads ultimately to a state of self-acceptance. This involves five critical tasks for the wrongdoer: (1) finding a way to recover self-respect and a sense of value as a person, (2) acknowledging wrongdoing and accepting full responsibility for the action(s), (3) recognizing the victim as a person worthy of respect, (4) experiencing the feelings that arise with the act of wrongdoing, and (5) addressing

patterns of behavior and attitudes that influenced wrongdoing.

Other writers have expanded this definition to bring out other important dimensions of self-forgiveness. Dillon (2001, p. 79), for example, writes "Self-forgiveness is not a matter of changing one's mind about what happened; it is interpreting one's self differently, because one has reason to do so." She emphasizes the importance of a particular kind of self-forgiveness—preservative self-forgiveness—that relies on a belief in oneself as good, but ultimately fallible. Preservative self-forgiveness allows for the possibility that self-respect can be restored through redemptive action and "It also preserves the integrity of the self, both in the sense of wholeness, by precluding self-alienation, and in the sense of unwavering commitment to one's values and standards..." (Dillon 2001, p. 73).

This kind of preservative self-forgiveness has a kind of moral significance in allowing those who have committed transgressions to regain moral agency and self-acceptance in the aftermath of wrongdoing (Snow 1993, p. 6). Snow points out that self-forgiveness is not the same as making excuses or rationalizing one's behavior and that it is possible to acknowledge and accept one's "faults and still be optimistic about the chances for improvement" (Snow 1993, p. 76). She also acknowledges that sometimes self-forgiveness and being able to live with oneself is the best that one can achieve, particularly in situations where interpersonal forgiveness is not possible.

Hall and Fincham (2005) argued that self-forgiveness is not a one-time event but rather a process that unfolds over time. They draw attention to a number of key motivational changes "...whereby one becomes decreasingly motivated to avoid stimuli associated with the offense (e.g., the victim), decreasingly motivated to retaliate against the self (e.g., punish the self, engage in self-destructive behaviors), and increasingly motivated to act benevolently toward the self." (2008, p. 175). In an empirical study of their model, Hall and Fincham (2008) tested the relationship between a number of key categories of variables (emotional, social-cognitive, behavioral, offense related) and self-forgiveness across individuals and within individuals over time. They found that guilt was the most important determinant of self-forgiveness and that as guilt decreased over time, self-forgiveness increased. Forgiveness from the target also increased self-forgiveness, while serious transgressions were associated with decreased self-forgiveness.

The ability to restore self-respect and retain a sense of personal integrity is also influenced by the kinds of narratives individuals create in the aftermath of wrongdoing. Weeks and Pasupathi (2011) argue that the creation of a positive, redemptive narrative from a negative event, such as harming another individual, is a critical component of

self-integration following these negative events (Maruna 2001; McAdams et al. 2001).

Methods

In order to extend this work further and explore in greater depth the process of making amends from the offender's perspective, we used an inductive, critical incident approach (e.g., Kerr et al. 1974) in which we gathered and analyzed MBA students' retrospective accounts of an incident in which they harmed another person(s) in the workplace and took steps to repair the damage. From these accounts, grounded in MBA students' actual experiences, new insights emerged regarding how workplace relationships are repaired in the wake of interpersonal harm.

Sample and Data Collection

After obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval, we collected data from 60 MBA students at a major U.S. university. Data were gathered in two sections of a required business ethics course and one section of a required managerial leadership course. Sixty percent of the respondents were male and 40 % were female. Although we did draw on a student sample for our study, this was a relatively experienced and diverse sample of MBA students. Eighty-eight percent of respondents had at least 2 years of work experience. Their work backgrounds included manufacturing, finance, accounting, information science, and market research in a variety of contexts such as real estate, education, health care, non-profit, military, and government.

All of the MBA students ($n = 42$) enrolled in the business ethics course were assigned a three-to-five page paper that asked them to reflect "on an incident in the workplace in which you took an action or decision that caused harm to another person, and then took steps to try repair the harm." Specific questions were asked regarding the context of the incident (e.g., who was harmed and in what ways?), what efforts were made to make things right with the person(s) harmed, what motivated the student to take the reparative actions, what self-directed actions were taken to restore a sense of personal integrity, and what was learned from the incident. To reduce mono-method bias, all of the students ($n = 18$) in the MBA leadership course received the assignment in the form of a questionnaire (see Appendix for questions from the paper assignment and questionnaire). Students were assured that the information gathered would be handled in a strictly confidential manner. Confidentiality was considered critical due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the importance of obtaining candid, honest information. Each student granted

permission for the researchers to use their account for research purposes. Six papers and ten questionnaires were removed from the analysis because the responses were written from an alternative (e.g., the target's) perspective or the student did not closely follow instructions. The final sample included data from 44 MBA students (36 papers and eight questionnaires).

Content Analysis

Consistent with our inductive, qualitative approach, we analyzed the students' accounts using a three-step content analysis procedure (e.g., Berg and Lune 2011; Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998) adapted from Butterfield et al. (1996), which corresponds closely to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as open, axial, and selective coding. In the initial or "unitizing" step, one of the researchers used NVivo 9 software to break each paper and questionnaire down into 2599 elemental "thought units" (e.g., Gioia and Sims 1986). A thought unit can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, an entire paragraph, or even parts of separate sentences or paragraphs, as long as a unique and complete thought or idea is identified. Each thought unit was maintained within relevant context from the original narrative and underlined so that it could be distinguished from its context.

In the second step ("categorizing"), the researcher who performed the unitizing step and a second researcher used the NVivo 9 software to identify patterns and organize the thought units into emergent categories. This is an iterative, intersubjective process in which the researchers compared similarities and differences among thought units and organized the thought units into clusters, or categories. The goal of this step is to maximize differences across categories while minimizing differences within categories. To the extent possible, the data are allowed to "speak for themselves" so that the categories emerge from the data (Butterfield et al. 1996; Glaser and Strauss 1967). To ensure consistent placement of thought units and adherence to category definitions (Charmaz 2006), the researchers conducted frequent "reality checks" (e.g., rereading the original student papers, negotiating differences, and revising category labels as necessary). After all of the thought units were categorized, we removed all thought units and categories that were not directly relevant to our research questions. This included descriptions of the situation or context within which the incident occurred (785 thought units), factors that motivated the respondent to engage in the harmful act (201 thought units), descriptions of the act of harm itself (70 thought units), and outcomes of the harm (514 thought units). A total of 1607 thought units (62 % of the total) were thus excluded from further analysis.

To ensure reliability in the categorization process, the third researcher, who was not involved in the unitizing or categorizing steps, independently sorted a randomly selected sample of the 992 remaining thought units into the emergent categories. Consistent with similar analyses (e.g., Butterfield et al. 1996), we selected a minimum of 25 % of thought units from each category, resulting in a sample of 276 thought units (27.8 %). Inter-rater agreement was calculated using the conservative P-statistic (Light 1971) in which the total number of thought units for which all three raters agreed is divided by the total number of thought units. Initial inter-rater agreement was 70.29 %, which is below the threshold of 80 % used in similar analyses (e.g., Butterfield et al. 1996). After differences were negotiated, final inter-rater agreement was 81.1 % with at least two of the three raters agreeing 99.3 % of the time. This level of agreement suggests that the emergent categories fit the data.

In the third or classifying step, the two researchers who conducted the categorizing step grouped all of the categories into higher-order categories, or themes (Butterfield et al. 1996). This is an iterative, intersubjective process similar to that used in the categorizing step. However, the goal in this step is to group categories into broad themes to aid analysis and data presentation. Similar to the categorizing step, the classifying process involved negotiation and reformulation to ensure that the themes fit the data.

Strengths and Limitations of the Methods

A potential methodological limitation is researcher bias during the content analysis. We attempted to minimize this bias using standard qualitative data analysis techniques such as involving multiple researchers at various phases of the analysis—particularly the categorizing and classifying steps, where bias is perhaps most likely, conducting an inter-rater agreement check, and negotiating disagreements that surfaced during each phase of the analysis.

Another potential limitation concerns the use of critical incident methodology. Critics of this method have argued that the accuracy of retrospective accounts can be compromised by imperfect recall, attributional and self-enhancement bias, and an unwillingness to be truthful and candid (e.g., Martin et al. 1983). However, adherents often contend that such data are likely to be valid and reliable because respondents self-select the incident and typically demonstrate an ability to provide extensive details about the situation (Motowidlo et al. 1992). Moreover, the critical incident methodology allows respondents to tell relatively unconstrained stories, providing a rich narrative that can surface information that might not be found using other methods (e.g., Martin et al. 1983). We may not necessarily have captured the most sensational or dramatic incidents,

particularly if respondents were ashamed by their actions or inactions in situations other than the one that they selected for this assignment. However, respondents offered a wide variety of harming/relationship repair incidents, such as stealing from their employers and allowing others to take the blame and subsequent punishment for their actions. We also attempted to encourage honesty and candor and minimize social desirability bias by assuring respondents complete confidentiality.

A third limitation pertains to priming effects. Some of the questions about respondents' motives for making amends, the nature of the amends, and outcomes were fairly specific in nature (e.g., regarding learning, self-forgiveness, and restoring personal integrity), which may have primed certain responses. However, the detailed nature of many responses suggests more than simple priming. For instance, the respondents discussed a wide variety of considerations that facilitate successful reparative action (e.g., setting the stage for success, good communication skills), although we did not explicitly ask about facilitating factors. In addition, the wide variety of motivating factors (e.g., emotions, fairness), types of amends (e.g., personal assistance), and outcomes (e.g., goodwill from the target) identified by respondents ranged well beyond the specific questions that were asked. In addition, given that there was no prior discussion in class of making amends and relationship repair prior to students completing the written paper or questionnaire, the potential for priming as a function of previous discussions was reduced.

Finally, the use of different data gathering techniques (written paper and questionnaire) represents a potential limitation. We attempted to minimize differences by asking questions on the survey that tapped the same or similar information as the paper assignment. However, the use of different techniques also represents a potential strength in reducing mono-method bias. If there were meaningful differences in responses across the written papers and questionnaires, unique insights may have surfaced that would not have been elicited by a single technique.

Findings and Contributions

We framed our three key research questions around critical areas of theoretical and empirical interest highlighted above: What factors motivate offenders to make amends with those they have harmed? In what ways do offenders attempt to make amends? What outcomes emerge from attempts to make amends (e.g., for the offender, target, or co-workers)? The analysis produced 36 categories, which were organized into four themes that correspond with our research questions: (1) Motivating Factors, (2) Amends, (3) Moderators of Amends, and (4) Outcomes. Table 1

Table 1 Emergent themes and categories

Category ^a	Example	Research supported/New contribution
Theme 1: Motivating factors		
1	Repentance (e.g., regret, mistakes made, might have done things differently in hindsight) (106/59 %)	I had missed a real opportunity here to build the confidence of a valued employee
2	Motivated by own emotions (guilt, embarrassment, regret) and ability to share others' emotions (i.e. empathy) (45/52 %)	I felt terrible about the whole thing and wondered how I could have changed the situation
3	Motivated by unfairness (e.g., target treated unfairly) (27/32 %)	I did not think it was fair that he had lost job when he was clearly not the one who had stolen the materials
4	Motivated to repair or preserve relationships, friendships, restore trust (26/34 %)	I felt badly that I had lied, and ruined my relationship and trust with the other employee
5	Motivated by target's circumstances (16/11 %)	I am aware that they have an underwater mortgage and two kids in high school
6	Motivated to benefit the organization (15/25 %)	My employer had a right to the lost profits from wages paid and I wrongfully took that away from them
7	Appeal to the Golden Rule (13/11 %)	Simply put, I did not treat her the way I would want to be treated
8	Motivated by sense of personal responsibility for harm caused (10/20 %)	As the Foreman, my brother was responsible to make sure it got done properly, but I was still responsible for all projects. I had to take responsibility for not checking their work also

Table 1 continued

Category ^a	Example	Research supported/New contribution
9 Motivated to reciprocate target's kindness (9/11 %)	I had to step up to the plate and give my time for them, just as they had given up their time for me	Support: Category 9 supports previous research which has suggested that amends can be motivated by a desire to maintain social relationships through reciprocation (e.g., Sharpe 2007)
10 Motivated by personal characteristics (e.g., religious beliefs, personality, personal power base) (8/7 %)	It is my faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to be obedient to His word that motivated me to respond to the situation by asking my co-worker for forgiveness	Partial Support/Contribution: Normative theorists have discussed the motivating role of religious beliefs in making amends (e.g., Garvey 1999). Category 10 extends this by adding personal characteristics such as one's personality and personal power base
11 Motivated by an interest in target's well-being (3/5 %)	I knew restitution was possible if I made it clear that my intentions were motivated by a genuine interest in her well-being	Partial Support/Contribution: Walker (2006) and others have suggested that the act of making amends is motivated in part by a concern for the target's well-being. Category 11 provides empirical support for this perspective
12 Misc. self-interested motives (19/14 %)	I realized I needed them, more then they needed me	Partial Support/Contribution: Category 12, along with categories 1, 2, 8, and 10, extends the view that making amends is sometimes done for self-interested reasons
13 Motives—general, non-specific (12/20 %)	...the much more poignantly memorable aspect of the situation was that I needed to correct the wrong against [the target]	
Theme 2: Amends		
14 Material amends: non-financial (e.g., provide help or assistance, reduce the target's burden, reduce or reverse primary or secondary damage) (55/43 %)	To help him deal with losing his job, I created a packet of information to help him file for unemployment immediately	Partial Support/Contribution: Scholars have argued that material amends can include actions that directly address the specific primary or secondary harms that result from the wrongdoing (e.g., Sharpe 2007). Category 14 extends this to organizational contexts, suggesting that material amends in organizations include helping and assisting the target, reducing the target's burden, and acting to minimize/reverse the damage that was caused
15 Symbolic amends (apology) (27/45 %)	I apologized and admitted to the mistake I'd made	Support: Category 15 confirms previous research suggesting that symbolic amends, typically in the form of apologies, are a common reparative action (e.g., Walker 2006; Exline et al. 2007; Sharpe 2007; Eaton et al. 2006; Goodstein and Aquino 2010)
16 Material amends: financial (8/11 %)	I offered to pay for it out of my wages because I felt his firing was largely because of what I had told my boss	Support: Category 16 confirms previous research suggesting that material amends commonly take the form of financial compensation (e.g., Walker 2006; Exline et al. 2007; Sharpe 2007; Eaton et al. 2006; Goodstein and Aquino 2010)
17 Amends process—general, non-specific (28/41 %)	I wasn't sure what else to say at that time, so I went off to think it over	

Table 1 continued

Category ^a	Example	Research supported/New contribution
Theme 3: Moderators of amends		
18 Importance of good communication skills (listening, directness, openness, honesty, being positive, constructive) (35/32 %)	Working through the issues with [the target] and being more open and honest with him about the problems was helpful	Support/Contribution: Theorists (e.g., Ren and Gray 2009; Dirks et al. 2009; Sherman and Strang 2007) have discussed factors that can facilitate relationship repair and the making of amends. Category 18 provides empirical support that making amends in organizations can be facilitated by good communication skills
19 Social accounts (attempts to explain harming behavior to target) (22/32 %)	After the initial uproar had ceased, I went to the marketing manager and explained my side of the story	Support/Contribution: Theorists (e.g., Garvey 1999; Ren and Gray 2009; Dirks et al. 2009) have discussed the importance of offering social accounts, acknowledging responsibility, and accepting blame as part of the process of making amends and repairing relationships. These categories offer empirical support of these phenomena within organizational contexts
20 Concessions: acknowledge harm, admit guilt, accept blame (11/16 %)	I told her that I realized my actions were wrong and offensive	
21 Setting the stage for amends attempt (e.g., importance of location, context of conversation) (8/16 %)	...as simple as this may sound, we went to a long, long lunch together	Contribution: These categories provide empirical support that making amends in organizations can be facilitated by setting the stage for a successful amends attempt (category 21) and fairness (category 22)
22 Importance of fairness (timeliness, objectivity) (5/5 %)	When examining my efforts to make amends, I believe that we made a good effort to fix the problem promptly	
Theme 4: Outcomes for the offender		
23 Self-improvement (lessons learned, personal growth, values, character development) (236/86 %)	Now because of those negative experiences I am back on track and hopefully more focused than ever on forging a future that puts people first and money second	Support/Contribution: Previous research has suggested several outcomes of amends attempts for the offender (e.g., Dillon 2001; Hall and Fincham 2005; 2008; Sherman and Strang 2007; Goodstein and Butterfield 2010). These include self-improvement, such as maintaining or enhancing one's values, character, and standards (category 23), emotional outcomes (category 24), self-forgiveness or lack thereof (categories 25 and 26), and enhanced self-respect and personal integrity (category 27). These categories provide empirical support for this previous work within organizational contexts
24 Emotional outcomes for oneself (18/32 %)	The guilt I felt that day will probably stick with me my entire life	
25 Self-forgiveness (I forgave myself, I did all I could do, I should not be too hard on myself) (13/20 %)	In order to restore my own self of personal integrity I forgave myself	
26 Lack of self-forgiveness (3/5 %)	The fact that I had lied to him continues to bother me even to this day	
27 Self-repair (e.g., restored personal integrity) (3/7 %)	...while repairing the harm I had done, I also repaired some of my personal integrity	
28 Offender asked for forgiveness (2/2 %)	It was humbling for me to ask for forgiveness from my co-worker, especially when I found her hard to work with	Partial Support/Contribution: Theorists (e.g., Garvey 1999; Ren and Gray 2009; Dirks et al. 2009; Goodstein and Butterfield 2010) have discussed the role of asking for forgiveness as part of the process of atonement and relationship repair. Category 28 offers some empirical support for this previous work within organizational contexts
29 Outcomes for self—general, non-specific (25/30 %)	I know that my story can serve as testimony to others, or at least to myself	

Table 1 continued

Category ^a	Example	Research supported/New contribution
Theme 5: Outcomes beyond offender		
30 Positive effects on offender-target relationship (including trust) (30/32 %)	As time passed and I fulfilled my side of the bargain, the trust was slowly rebuilt	Partial Support/Contribution: Researchers (e.g., Braithwaite 1999; McCullough et al. 2001; Sherman and Strang 2007; Witvliet et al. 2008; Ren and Gray 2009; Dirks et al. 2009) have identified several outcomes of repair attempts that extend beyond the offender, including improved working relationships and trust (category 30), negative outcomes from failed repair attempts (category 31), and positive responses from the target (category 32)
31 Negative outcomes beyond oneself (e.g., deteriorated relationship) (20/18 %)	By now, however, the situation had become so tense that [the target] and I could not work together any longer.	
32 Goodwill from target (thank you, forgiveness, gratitude, reciprocation of apology) (18/27 %)	She also apologized and said she did not mean to talk down to me and was not purposely trying to make things more difficult for me	
33 Positive outcomes for the organization (managers, co-workers) (16/23 %)	The pay increase actually motivated people to work more hours and increase sales	
34 Other benefits for the target (13/14 %)	[The target] told me that he took it to heart and it helped him to become more confident	
35 Outcomes beyond the offender—general, non-specific (12/23 %)	We went about our business that day and eventually things were back to what I felt was normal	
36 Misc. general or non-specific reflections on the incident (106/73 %)	I gained a deep appreciation for skilled mediators to help resolve conflicts within the organization	Contribution: Categories 33–34 offer additional insight into outcomes beyond the offender that occur in organizational contexts, including positive outcomes for the organization (category 33) and for the target (category 34)

^a The first number in parentheses refers to frequency—the total number of times that a category appeared in the data. The second number in parentheses refers to percent coverage—the percentage of respondents (out of 44 total respondents) appearing in each category

includes theme names, category names, frequencies (the number of times a given category appeared in the data), percent coverage (the percentage of student respondents, out of a total of 44, appearing in each category), an example of each category, and a summary of the extent to which the findings support existing theory and research or offer new contributions. Following Table 1, we next review key findings within each theme that provide empirical support for existing theory and research and highlight unanticipated findings that uncover new knowledge about making amends in organizational contexts.

Motivating Factors

The first theme, motivation factors, included 13 categories and contained a total of 309 thought units from 42 (95 %) of the respondents. We defined motivating factors as influences on the arousal, direction, and persistence of effort (e.g., Mitchell 1982) on the part of offenders in making amends. The largest category in this theme involved repentance, including reflecting on mistakes they made during the incident, regrets that they harbored and ways that they might have acted differently with the benefit of hindsight (category 1). Examples include, “I could have

prevented this situation from happening by nipping it in the bud, but instead I was too uncomfortable going to her and being candid so a larger issue was eventually created,” and, “Looking back now I don’t feel like I really considered her needs or my own and clearly should have prepared more prior to this interaction.” This finding supports previous work suggesting that the amends process often includes repentance, including thoughts and feelings such as remorse, regret, contrition and self-reproach (Garvey 1999; Radzik 2009; Swinburne 1989).

The data also offer empirical support for previous research that has suggested that motives for making amends include emotions (category 2; e.g., Braithwaite 1999; Exline et al. 2007; Mikula 1994; Radzik 2009; Sherman and Strang 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002), feelings/perceptions of injustice (category 3; e.g., Andiappan and Treviño 2011), a desire to restore trust and repair relationships (category 4; e.g., Fehr and Gelfand 2012; Goodstein and Butterfield 2010; Radzik 2009; Walker 2006), responsibility, accountability, and causality (category 8; e.g., Gonzales et al. 1992; Mikula 1994; Weiner et al. 1991), a desire to maintain stable social relationships through reciprocation (category 9; e.g., Sharpe 2007), and personal (e.g., religious) beliefs (category 10; e.g., Garvey 1999).

Other findings in this theme extend existing research. The category with the second highest frequency and percent coverage in this theme was “motivated by own emotions and ability to share others’ emotions” (category 2). Previous research suggests that amends can be motivated by a desire to discharge negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and regret as well as the eliciting of empathy (Braithwaite 1999; Exline et al. 2007; Mikula 1994; Radzik 2009; Sherman and Strang 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Within this category, empathy was expressed most often (13 out of 45 statements). For example, “I tried to put myself in her situation and understand how it felt to have one’s authority undermined publicly.” However, the findings showed that the majority (32 out of 45) of respondents expressed negative emotions, with guilt (12 statements) being the most prevalent. For example, “After a few days of sitting around feeling sheepish and very guilty, I decided to talk to the person who I had wronged.” Three emotions: fear, distress, and embarrassment were not anticipated as motives for making amends based on previous research and represent potential avenues for future research.

The next largest overall category in this theme was “unfairness” (category 3). Many respondents appeared to be motivated to make amends in response to perceived unfair treatment or an unfair outcome for the target. For example, “I also felt like I had gotten a little caught up in the situation and hadn’t been entirely fair to my co-worker when I went to our manager.”

The relatively large size of the fairness category is consistent with prevalence of the justice-based perspective in the apology and amends literature. From this perspective, a state of injustice is created when an offender harms a target. Amends are viewed as an appropriate means of restoring justice and are particularly likely for high-severity offenses and when offenders view themselves as responsible for the harm (e.g., Exline et al. 2007). We were interested to find that virtually all of the statements in this category involved interactional or procedural fairness as opposed to distributive (outcome-based) fairness. Interactional concerns were particularly prevalent, with several respondents commenting on how they had treated the target in an inappropriate manner (e.g., being too harsh) and how that motivated them to make amends. Future research might pursue this area of inquiry, for example examining feelings of unfairness as a trigger for making amends. Researchers might also explore the degree to which offenders, targets, and other affected parties (e.g., observers) emphasize interactional and procedural considerations versus other justice dimensions.

Another finding that extends existing research involved five categories containing self-interested motives. Although the fact that motives for making amends with others are sometimes self-interested may not be surprising, much of

the existing research has generally emphasized other-focused motives. For example, the justice-based forgiveness literature views amends as a means of restoring fairness for the target of the harm (e.g., Exline et al. 2007). In the restorative justice literature, amends are generally characterized as a means of redressing others’ harm or restoring relationships among affected parties (e.g., Goodstein and Aquino 2010). Radzik argues that “The overall goal of offering amends... is the reconciliation of damaged or threatened relationships among wrongdoers, victims, and (at times) communities” (2007, pp. 194–195). Others have viewed the act of making amends as a reciprocal interpersonal process that helps redress harm and maintain stable social relationships (e.g., Sharpe 2007). However, research has increasingly recognized self-focused motives such as discharging one’s own negative emotions, acting on one’s beliefs, a desire for self-forgiveness, or a need to restore one’s self-respect or moral self-image (e.g., Dillon 1997, 2001; Enright 1996; Fisher and Exline 2006; Hall and Fincham 2005; Shnabel et al. 2009; Radzik 2009; Weeks and Pasupathi 2011).

Our findings support and extend this literature, suggesting that self-interested motives include regret and other outcomes of repentance (category 1), discharging negative emotions (category 2), being motivated by a sense of personal responsibility for the harm that was caused (category 8), one’s personal characteristics and beliefs (category 10), and a variety of general or non-specific statements about a desire to benefit oneself (category 12). We view self-focused versus other-focused motives (and potential tensions between them) as an interesting area for future research.

Other categories extend previous work by suggesting motives that may be specific to organizational contexts. Category 5 suggests that organizational members are more motivated to make amends when the target faces adversity or undesirable circumstances. Several respondents demonstrated an awareness of hardships (e.g., family illness, financial difficulties) faced by the target, which apparently increased respondents’ motivation to make amends. Category 6 suggests that organizational members may be more motivated to make amends when the amends are perceived to benefit or reduce/prevent harm to the larger organization (e.g., avoiding lost productivity). We are unaware of the research that has examined organizational benefits of employee amends, and we see this as an interesting avenue for future research.

Amends

The second theme, amends, consisted of four categories and contained a total of 118 thought units from 40 (91 %) of the respondents. These categories represent the specific

action(s) taken by the offender to remedy harm, repair relationships, or otherwise “make things right” with the target.

According to Sharpe (2007), amends can be material and/or symbolic in nature. Material amends include financial compensation, goods, and/or concrete actions intended to repair a specific harm or to compensate for the damage or loss associated with that harm. The findings regarding financial amends (category 16) are consistent with previous theorizing, suggesting that organizational members sometimes offer material amends in the form of financial compensation when they harm others. Given that the respondents were MBA students, we found it interesting that so few attempts to make amends (8 statements, 11 % coverage) were financial in nature. However, it is possible that many of the respondents were drawing on experiences they had as lower-level employees, who may not have been in a position to offer financial compensation.

The results provide additional insight into other forms of material amends. An unexpected finding was that respondents offered many more statements regarding non-financial material amends (category 14; 55 statements, 43 % coverage) than financial amends. Respondents discussed a wide variety of non-financial gestures intended to repair the specific harm or compensate for the damage or loss associated with that harm. Some gestures represented attempts to undo or reverse primary harm (e.g., trying to convince the supervisor not to fire the target), whereas others focused on secondary harm (e.g., the target’s damaged reputation as a result of being fired). The most common type of gesture involved engaging in extra personal or work-related effort to reduce the target’s burden or assist the target (e.g., help a target who was fired to find new employment). For example, “I truly have attempted to try to help him in all ways that I could think of to find another job and to provide for his family’s needs.”

As discussed by Sharpe, whereas material amends address “the specific harms (tangible or intangible) that result from wrongdoing,” symbolic amends, such as apology, “speak to the wrongness of the act itself” (2007, p. 27). Although apology is the primary form of symbolic amends, other forms include buying the target a gift, donating to a charity of the target’s choice, and performing community service,

Symbolic reparation can do two things that material reparation cannot. One is that it can help redress harms that cannot be repaired, such as permanent injury or death. Secondly, symbolic reparation can go to a layer underneath specific harms, redressing the injury of injustice itself (Sharpe 2007, p. 32).

Walker (2006) discusses a variety of symbolic gestures that offenders might offer, such as extending an apology,

accepting responsibility and blame, showing repentance, and seeking forgiveness. Research has shown that apologies can be a particularly salient and powerful form of symbolic amends and can provide many benefits. For the offender, benefits include relieving feelings of guilt, providing a vehicle for earning redemption, and facilitating empathy and forgiveness (Bazemore 1998; Exline et al. 2007). For the target, psychological and emotional benefits are often tied to forgiveness, which allows the target to overcome or discharge hostile feelings such as resentment and anger (e.g., Walker 2006). Research on concessions has demonstrated that apologies are more effective when combined with an acknowledgement of responsibility, expressed remorse, or material compensation (e.g., Gonzales et al. 1992; Mikula 1994; Schonbach 1990; Tata 2000).

Our findings support and extend the existing literature in this area. Although apology (category 15) was the second largest amends category based on frequency, it was the largest category in terms of percent coverage (45 %). Twenty-seven statements in this category explicitly referred to offering an apology as part of an effort to make amends. In many cases, apology was the primary (and often the only) form of amends that was discussed. For example, “After I had time to cool off and realize the magnitude of the situation, I felt the need to personally call (him) and apologize for my actions.” The findings also echo Sharpe’s observation that material and symbolic amends overlap to a large extent; material amends (e.g., writing a check) can have a symbolic effect (e.g., giving the target a renewed sense of status and power), and symbolic amends (e.g., a sincere expression of remorse and an apology) can make a substantial difference in the target’s work or personal life. Whether an amends attempt is material or symbolic can also depend on one’s perspective; what one party might see as material, another party might perceive as symbolic.

Taken together, these findings offer insights into the types of amends that occur in organizational contexts. The existing amends literature has focused heavily on apologies (e.g., Eaton et al. 2006; Exline et al. 2007), and thus the prevalence of material amends, particularly those that are non-financial in nature, was unexpected. This result indicates that apologies may not be the most prevalent or important form of amends within organizational contexts. Instead, it appears that moral repair in the aftermath of interpersonal harm in organizations often goes beyond “mere words” (i.e. a spoken or written apology) to include actions that range well beyond financial compensation. To our knowledge, organizational scholars have yet to examine directly specific forms of action-oriented material amends such as initiating extra personal and/or work-related effort to benefit the target, to reduce the target’s burden, or to repair/reverse the damage that was done to

the target (e.g., to the target's reputation or career prospects). We see this as an important opportunity for future research.

Moderators of Amends

The third theme pertains to moderators of amends, defined as factors that influence (facilitate or inhibit) the relationship between motivating factors and making amends. Previous organizational research has suggested several factors that may facilitate or inhibit this relationship, particularly in the literature on relationship repair (e.g., Dirks et al. 2009; Ren and Gray 2009). The five categories in this theme support and extend this existing literature, providing empirical evidence that communication skills, social accounts, and concessions, how one sets the stage for the amends attempt, and fairness can inhibit or facilitate attempts at reparative action.

Category 18 was the largest in this theme, demonstrating that respondents were particularly aware of the importance of effective communication skills when making amends. This included good listening skills and communicating in a direct, open, honest, positive, and constructive manner. For example, "I got online and sent [the target] a long email and tried to communicate several things that I hadn't expressed adequately when we said goodbye earlier in the day."

Another factor that facilitates or inhibits the making of amends is the use of social accounts, which involve explaining the harming behavior to the target (Ren and Gray 2009). It is noteworthy that seven out of the 22 social accounts (category 19) appeared to take the form of denial, excuses, justification, and/or rationalization which have been discussed in previous literature as "explanations aimed at extricating an actor from a social predicament by minimizing the severity of a decision's results or minimizing responsibility for them" (Konovsky and Folger 1991, p. 632). For example, "I explained that...I was having a difficult time keeping up with the demands of caring for a new baby and having to work the long hours."

A more reparative and socially desirable form of account is concession, which involves acknowledging the transgression, accepting personal responsibility, and extending an apology. Concessions were reflected in category 20, which included statements acknowledging responsibility for harm, admitting guilt, or accepting blame. Although it is difficult to make an exact comparison, the findings across these categories (including category 15—apology) suggest a greater frequency and percent coverage of positive accounts (i.e., concessions) versus negative accounts (i.e., denial, excuses, and justifications). Future research might usefully examine the prevalence, salience, and impact on targets or other parties of various types of

accounts offered by offenders. We also encourage future research that examines factors that influence the likelihood that offenders will admit wrongdoing, acknowledge responsibility, or accept personal blame (e.g., Tata 2000; Weiner et al. 1991).

Category 21 extends existing literature and may be somewhat unique to organizational contexts: setting the stage for a successful amends attempt. Many of these statements reflected a belief that amends have a greater likelihood of success when the repair attempt takes place outside of the organization, often over a meal or coffee. The data suggest that organizational members often view these as important considerations when making amends. We encourage future research that examines these findings in greater detail.

Category 22 echoes theme 1 (motives), suggesting that fairness considerations play a role both in motivating and facilitating amends. We found it interesting that the fairness-based category in the motivation theme pertained to "unfairness," whereas all of the statements in this category referred to "fairness." This is consistent with the organizational and social justice literature, which has extensively examined injustice as a powerful motivating factor (e.g., Greenberg 1990). However, in discussing the amends making process, respondents emphasized fairness rather than remedying unfairness. We should also note that this fairness category was significantly smaller (5 statements, 5 % coverage) than the fairness category in the motivation theme (27 statements, 32 % coverage). However, similar to the motivation theme, interactional and procedural fairness concerns (e.g., maintaining one's objectivity, timeliness) were more important than distributive justice concerns.

Outcomes

The fourth theme, outcomes, contained the highest overall frequency (515 statements, 100 % coverage), indicating the importance of outcomes in the moral repair process. For purposes of presentation, we divided this theme into two subthemes, outcomes for the offender and outcomes for others beyond the offender.

Outcomes for the Offender

In this subtheme, respondents' attention focuses on outcomes for themselves as the offending party. The literature in this area has identified several outcomes of amends attempts for the offender, and several categories provide empirical support for this previous research. These outcomes include maintaining or enhancing one's values, character, and standards (category 23), emotional outcomes (category 24), self-forgiveness or lack thereof (categories 25 and 26), enhanced self-respect and personal integrity

(category 27), and asking for forgiveness (category 28) (e.g., Dillon 2001; Goodstein and Butterfield 2010; Hall and Fincham 2005; 2008; Sherman and Strang 2007).

The findings also extend existing research by providing additional insight into these outcomes. The largest outcome category (category 23) pertained to areas of self-improvement. Many statements in this category reflected lessons learned by offenders. Although this is not surprising given that the assignment explicitly asked students what they learned from the incident, insight was provided in the wide variety of lessons learned and how, in many cases the incident changed their personal and professional lives. Examples include, “I learned the value in not making snap judgments,” “I realized that sometimes other people do things that are out of character for them too, and that I do not know all of the circumstances,” and “I learned to carefully evaluate my priorities and the consequences of my choices both from a short-term as well as from a long-term perspective.” Other statements reflected growth in the respondent’s character, values, and other personal characteristics. For example, “This experience influenced my character in that it reaffirmed to me the importance of quickly making amends when I offend someone.”

Consistent with results regarding emotion as a motivating factor, category 24 includes statements regarding emotional outcomes of the amends process. Half (9 of the 18) of the statements in this category reflected positive emotions, including pride for being able to admit fault, feeling glad about a positive outcome for the target, feelings of gratitude toward the target for how he/she responded to the amends attempt, and feeling “good,” “better,” or “happy” about how they handled the situation. For example, “I have to say that it feels good to know that in a difficult situation I am able to ‘walk the talk’ and stand up for a moral principle I hold dear.” The remaining nine statements regarding emotion were negative in nature, including feeling “bad,” “terrible,” “remorse” and “guilt” in the aftermath of the incident. This supports research suggesting that negative emotions such as guilt plays an important role in the wake of wrongdoing (Hall and Fincham 2008). We were interested to find that virtually all of the statements regarding emotion in the outcomes theme were self-focused. Respondents were apparently not aware of (or simply chose not to discuss) emotional responses on the part of the target and other parties.

We were interested by the lack of comments regarding self-forgiveness (categories 25 and 26). Of the 13 statements in category 25, only seven explicitly reported self-forgiveness. For example, one respondent suggested that self-forgiveness was possible because the harming behavior was so out of the ordinary, “I was able to forgive myself because I knew I reacted in an out of character fashion.” The other six statements were only indicative of

self-forgiveness, such as “I have to not be too hard on myself,” and “By doing all I could, I was able to sleep at night with a clear conscience.” We encourage future research to examine factors that influence self-forgiveness (or lack thereof) in organizational contexts in greater detail.

Outcomes Beyond the Offender

In the final seven categories, the focus of attention and concern shifts to outcomes for other people, including the target and other affected parties (e.g., managers, the company). The findings support previous research, which has identified several outcomes of repair attempts that extend beyond the offender, including improved working relationships and trust (category 30), negative outcomes from failed repair attempts (category 31), and positive responses such as goodwill from the target (category 32) (e.g., Braithwaite 1999; Dirks et al. 2009; McCullough et al. 2001; Ren and Gray 2009; Sherman and Strang 2007; Witvliet et al. 2008).

The findings also provide insight into outcomes for people other than the offender. For example, the largest category involves positive effects on the offender-target relationship (category 30). Many of these statements reflected a sense that relationships were strengthened by the incident, “I am very lucky that I was able to learn such a valuable lesson about maintaining relationships when damage may have been done.” Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Kim et al. 2004, 2006; Ren and Gray 2009), several statements in this category suggested that trust was gained by the act of making amends. For example, “As time passed and I fulfilled my side of the bargain, the trust was slowly rebuilt.”

Category 34 suggests additional positive outcomes for the target, including personal benefits such as increased confidence and work-related benefits such as improved motivation and job performance. For example, “[The target] continued to develop into... a great employee.”

We were also interested to find that the target sometimes responded to offenders’ amends attempts with their own gestures of goodwill (category 32). These included expressions of gratitude and acceptance or reciprocation of the offender’s apology. Examples include, “I was pleasantly surprised at her gratitude for my coming to make amends with her,” and “[The target’s] keenness to accept an apology was the key aspect in the success of repairing the situation.”

The results also suggested positive outcomes for the larger work group, organization, and/or management (category 33). The most frequently discussed benefits involved a more peaceful or harmonious work environment and improved work performance. These findings suggest another important area for future research. In addition to

examining psychological and emotional benefits of amends for the offender-target dyad, researchers might examine benefits to a broader range of stakeholders, including co-workers, the organization, and managers.

We note that some of the outcomes discussed by respondents were negative in nature. Interestingly, most of these negative outcomes were for people other than themselves. Most of the self-focused negative outcomes pertained to not being successful in the amends attempt. For example, “I was not successful in making things right, and I don’t think this harm could ever be repaired.” Other negative outcomes described a deteriorating relationship between the offender and the target (category 31). For example, “The unfortunate incident put an untimely end to our friendship.” These comments suggest that amends attempts are not always successful and can trigger a variety of unintended negative consequences. To our knowledge, organizational researchers have paid little attention to these negative outcomes. However, we argue that such research is important because it can help organizational members prevent such negative outcomes.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Our additional analysis of the findings contributed to the development of an inductive model of amends-making in organizations that offers insight to practicing managers and can guide future research in this area. As shown in Fig. 1, the model highlights key motivating factors, types of amends, moderators of amends, and outcomes that are important to understanding offenders’ attempts at moral repair in organizational contexts. In the interest of parsimony, we used 10 % coverage as the minimum threshold

for inclusion in the model and did not include general, non-specific, or miscellaneous categories (categories 12, 13, 17, 29, 35, and 36).

The model offers a broader and more complex view of organizational amends attempts than suggested by previous literature. Numerous insights emerged from the data that offer implications for research and management practice beyond those already discussed. For example, although our findings agree with previous research that the act of making amends in organizations is an emotionally charged experience for the offender, our findings also suggest that offenders’ emotions may vary depending on the phase of the amends making process. In terms of motives, the results show a dominant emphasis on discharging negative emotions such as guilt, fear, and embarrassment (particularly guilt). In the aftermath of making amends, emotional outcomes were positive or negative depending on the perceived success or failure of the amends attempt.

The focus on actual workplace experiences as a foundation for this research also offers new insight into the types of amends offered in work environments, in particular non-financial material amends. Although several offenders reported offering apologies as a way of making amends with targets, others discussed a variety of concrete actions taken to repair a specific primary or secondary harm or to compensate for the damage or loss associated with that harm. Those actions ranged beyond a simple apology, for example, to offering personal time to help the target restore damaged relationships. The findings also offer new insight into factors that facilitate or inhibit the making of amends. Key moderators include communication skills (e.g., effective listening, being positive and constructive), social accounts, and setting the stage for an effective amends attempt (e.g., meeting over coffee or a meal).

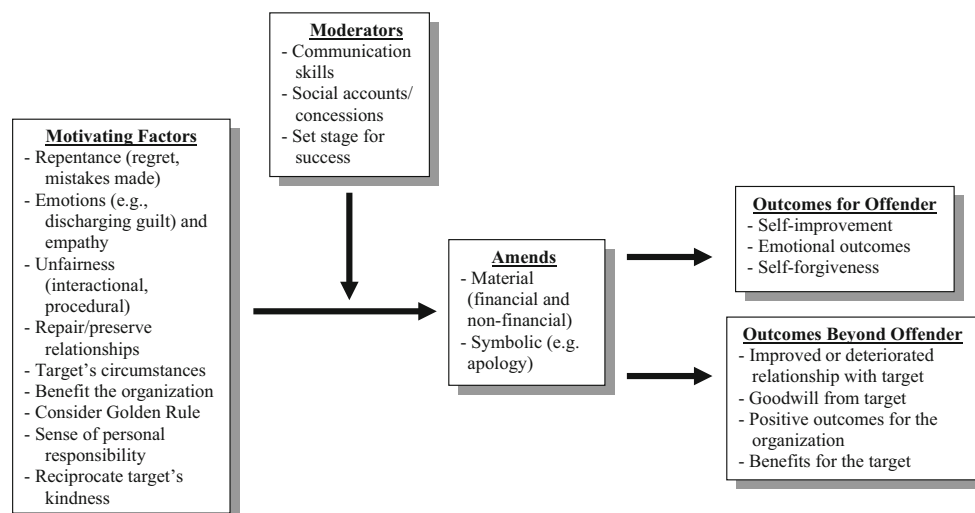


Fig. 1 An inductive model of amends-making in organizations

The findings regarding outcomes also provide new insights. The results suggest that making amends can serve a wide variety of purposes that benefit a variety of affected parties (the offender, the target, the organization, and other stakeholders). For example, respondents shed significant light on exchanges of goodwill, trust, and other effects on the offender-target relationship as well as implications for developing their character, underscoring the ways in which efforts to make amends can reinforce a redemptive narrative that supports learning and growth from adversity (McAdams et al. 2001; Weeks and Pasupathi 2011).

Another way to draw insights from the model is to consider what these amends makers did not discuss. For example, it was interesting to note that only one account out of 44 indicated that the offender explicitly asked the target for forgiveness and only two accounts (including the one mentioned above) indicated that forgiveness was granted. Despite the growing literature on forgiveness (e.g., Petrucci 2002; Takaku 2001), including some research in business environments (e.g., Eaton et al. 2006; Struthers et al. 2005), this suggests that asking for forgiveness in a business context may be a relatively rare phenomenon. We encourage researchers to explore this issue in greater detail, including examining personal and contextual factors that influence when individuals will ask for and be extended forgiveness in organizational contexts.

We were also surprised to find so few comments regarding self-repair and self-forgiveness, especially given the growing literature in this area (e.g., Dillon 1997, 2001; Enright 1996; Fisher and Exline 2006; Hall and Fincham 2005; Radzik 2009; Weeks and Pasupathi 2011) and the fact that respondents were prompted to comment on this topic. There was little mention of gains in self-respect, reduced self-condemnation, or increased confidence in one's integrity—all of which are prominent themes in the self-forgiveness literature. One possible explanation is recall bias; respondents may have recalled incidents that involved guilt and a lack of forgiveness from the target, factors that have been shown to decrease the likelihood of self-forgiveness (Hall and Fincham 2008). This explanation is supported by the previously mentioned finding that so few accounts indicated that the target offered forgiveness. Future research may be able to shed additional light on these findings by examining factors that facilitate or inhibit self-forgiveness and other forms of self-repair in work contexts.

We were also interested that the respondents rarely mentioned their immediate supervisors. The data suggest that offenders rarely talk to their managers about making amends, and managers appear to play little if any role in the process. Given the potential for positive individual, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes suggested by the model, this represents an opportunity for practicing

managers. Managers might educate their employees on the many benefits of making amends, including the possibility of restoring their sense of integrity and moral image, discharging negative feelings, restoring a sense of justice, and improving workplace relationships. Managers might also attempt to facilitate the making of amends in ways suggested by our findings, such as helping to set the stage for success (e.g., offering to supply meeting space and refreshments) or assisting in the repair of secondary damage (e.g., assuring affected parties that the event did not diminish the manager's perception of them).

Our study also points to insights that are of particular relevance for business ethics scholars. At the heart of our inquiry is an attempt to better understand an important dimension of moral agency in organizations—what it means, and in particular, how it might be enacted in situations where individuals have committed transgressions that are interpersonal as well as organizational (e.g., violation of rules) in nature. As noted earlier, within the broader ethics literature (Radzik 2007, 2009; Walker 2006) as well as the business ethics literature, moral agency is often about choosing “the right thing to do” (e.g., Treviño and Weaver 1994) or determining whether to take action to prevent others from acting unethically, such as in the case of whistleblowing (e.g., Near et al. 2004). Our paper emphasizes moral agency in the aftermath of harmdoing and specifically from the perspective of the offender and how this individual responds as a moral agent to the harm inflicted on others. From this perspective, making amends can be seen as a way of demonstrating one's competence as a moral agent, through active participation in righting a wrong (Walker 2006) and this opens up a variety of avenues to explore with respect to the kinds of skills, practices, and even virtues critical to reinforcing this kind of moral agency.

There are implications as well for understanding the nature of role morality and responsibility in organizations. If role responsibility in organizations means fulfilling those obligations that are assumed by virtue of taking on a particular role or position in an organization (DeGeorge 2013), then under certain circumstances employees and managers may not feel a responsibility to make amends for those they may have harmed. For example, there are actions and decisions that individuals take on as a function of their roles in business organizations which do cause harm to others. Molinsky and Margolis (2005, p. 247) discuss these kinds of actions and decisions as “necessary evils,”

...a performance task that must be executed proficiently in order to advance the valued purpose and fulfill an individual's work responsibilities. It is also an act that can be understood in a plurality of ways as both causing ineradicable harm and contributing to a greater good.

Those who perform these necessary evils, such as managers who layoff or transfer employees, may feel genuine remorse about the harm they have caused, recognize their responsibility, and feel guilt about harming others. However, they may feel that they do not have a responsibility to make amends, given that the action also contributes to a greater good for the organization. This is not to say that one cannot perform these necessary evils in ways that minimize the harm. Margolis and Molinsky (2008) suggest that when individuals acknowledge the harm they have caused and psychologically engage with those harmed, rather than try to disengage or rationalize their actions, they can respond with sympathy, sensitivity, and in personally responsive ways. Nevertheless, to what extent role responsibility in business organizations encourages or limits the making of amends in the aftermath of interpersonal harm is an important topic for business ethics scholars to engage.

We did not explore in our study the roles or obligations of the victim and other parties in the workplace in enabling the offender's efforts in meeting their responsibilities as moral agents and making amends. The relationship between these parties is a complex one and one that places difficult moral demands on the offender. Walker (2006, p. 201) notes,

When we do wrong or take responsibility for harm, we become participants in a process we do not control, and that in its nature requires a vulnerability to others that is risky. We open a transaction in which we have by our admission yielded certain prerogatives to others, to judge us and to place demands upon us...where wrongdoing is very serious, the stakes in meeting the requirements, the likelihood of rebuff, and the degree of exposure, discomfort, and cost may be steep.

Nevertheless, there may be "favorable circumstances" that rely on the efforts of others in the workplace to encourage wrongdoers to accept responsibility for the wrong they have caused and to take action to repair the harm,

Favorable circumstances for seeking to make amends are ones in which a path is visible to the wrongdoer that leads through amends to renewed good standing, and in which there is some incentive to take that path, especially the incentive of regaining a values relationship or being released from the bad opinion or punitive responses of others. Communities can informally support or even institutionalize such paths... (Walker 2006, p. 195).

We noted above that many respondents wrote explicitly about redemptive aspects of making amends in terms of personal lessons learned, the development of character, and restored relationships (McAdams 2005). And yet, very few

students wrote explicitly about self-forgiveness. In fact for some, such as the respondent quoted in Table 1, "The guilt I felt that day will probably stick with me my entire life." These findings point to a kind of moral paradox Williston (2012) and in particular Dillon (2001) write about with respect to self-forgiveness,

One can both value oneself enough to get on with one's life and yet rightly carry a burden of guilt and shame to one's grave. And the closer to the core the violated standards, the more reason there is not to lay down the burden. But, and here's the important thing, to go on like this can be to have forgiven oneself. Self-forgiveness does not require extinguishing self-reproach, for it is not really about the presence of absence of negative feelings and judgments, it's about their power. (Dillon 2001, p. 83).

We adopted a qualitative approach that we believe has yielded important inductive insights into our central research questions for business ethics and management scholars. We see potential for scholars to pursue these and related questions through various research strategies in a variety of research contexts. For example, researchers might look to health care organizations (e.g., hospitals), where the making of amends in the aftermath of medical errors is increasingly common (e.g., Morreim 2000). Experimental or survey methodologies might be used to examine health care providers' motives to make amends (e.g., self-focused motives such as preventing malpractice litigation or alleviating guilt versus other-focused motives such as benefitting the injured patient) and linkages to the type and process of amends (e.g., moving beyond an apology and financial compensation to include other benevolent actions such as providing ongoing counseling for the patient and their family) and outcomes (e.g., self-forgiveness, satisfaction of affected parties). Overall, this research should help managers understand the complexity of making amends in organizational contexts and stimulate additional research in this area.

Appendix

Written Paper Assignment

1. Describe the incident (do not use real names or identifying information). Where did it take place (e.g., summer internship, in an engineering position within a high technology firm) and when? What action/decision did you take? Who was harmed and in what ways?
2. Discuss the efforts you made to make things right with the person(s) you harmed. What specific action(s) did you take? What motivated you to take these actions?

3. In addition to these efforts to make amends with others, what self-directed actions, such as self-forgiveness, did you take to restore your own sense of personal integrity?
4. What did you learn from this incident?

Questionnaire

Please take a moment to reflect on your past and present work experience. Try to think of a particular situation in which you took an action or made a decision that harmed someone else and then attempted to make it right.

1. What action/decision did you take that caused the harm?
2. Who was harmed and in what ways?
3. What did you do to make things right?
4. Why did you respond in this way?
5. Were you effective in making things right? If so, how? If not, why not? What would have made things right for that person?
6. Did your efforts to make things right make a difference in how others treated you?
7. Did your work organization do anything to help or support you as you attempted to make things right?
8. How did your attempts to make things right affect you? Did your efforts make a difference in how you perceived yourself? Did you feel better about yourself?
9. How did your attempts to make things right affect the company?

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