The Ethics of Meaningful Work: Types and Magnitude of Job-Related Harm and the Ethical Decision-Making Process

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Abstract This research on the ethics of meaningful work examined how types of job-related harm (physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive) and their magnitude of consequences (MOC, low, high) influenced components of ethical decision-making (moral recognition, moral evaluations, and moral intentions). The research also investigated the moderating effects of individual differences (experience with carpal tunnel syndrome, experience with layoffs, ability to read others' emotions, and intrinsic motivation orientation [IMO]) on the relation between the MOC and the ethical decision-making elements for each type of harm. Using a sample of 185 Chinese professionals, a between-subjects, fully crossed experimental scenario design revealed that physical and economic job-related harm were recognized as moral issues to a greater extent than cognitive or emotional harm. Second, physical job-related harm stimulated a higher level of moral evaluations than economic and cognitive harm. Third, individuals intended to act ethically when MOC was high versus low. Finally, experience with layoffs and IMO helped explain the relations between MOC and moral evaluations for economic and cognitive job-related harm, respectively. Implications for research and management are discussed.

Keywords Ethical decision-making · Individual differences · Job design · Job-related harm · Magnitude of consequences · Meaningful work

Abbreviations

CTD	Cumulative trauma disorder
MOC	Magnitude of consequences
CTS	Carpal tunnel syndrome
AROE	Ability to read others' emotions
IMO	Intrinsic motivation orientation

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Managers often react to difficult economic pressures by simplifying the nature of work, laying off workers, or outsourcing tasks to reduce labor costs (Manning et al. 2008). Recent news that Apple's suppliers in China must change their working conditions (e.g., use of toxic chemicals, poor ventilation for aluminum dust, excessive overtime, ergonomic hazards, and low pay) demonstrates the type of work design decisions that are made by managers and highlights the importance of the human costs associated with them (e.g., death, injuries, and suicide attempts) (Duhigg and Barboza 2012). Although largely neglected in the past, a few researchers in the business ethics arena have begun to examine the ethical considerations regarding the nature of work (Bowie 1998; Gandz and Bird 1996) and

working conditions (Guvenli and Sanyal 2002). Such attention is warranted given that there is a tension between what individuals want out of their work in order to flourish at work (Keyes and Haidt 2003; May et al. 2004; Oldham and Hackman 2010) and the work design decisions that managers often make to cut short-term costs.

The purpose and central contribution of this research is the examination of the ethical nature of meaningful work design (Bowie 1998) from a moral intensity perspective grounded in positive organizational ethics (Handelsman et al. 2002) and positive organizational scholarship (May et al. 2004; Pratt and Ashforth 2003). Each of these ideas is defined briefly here and developed more fully in the literature review that follows.

Building off of Bowie's (1998) initial work, meaningful work design is defined as involving physical welfare, complex work that provides opportunities for growth and self-expression, emotional engagement, and financial security. The moral intensity perspective in business ethics literature is based on Jones' (1991) issue-contingent model of ethical decision-making in which characteristics of the issue or situation influence how individuals may ethically respond to it. Finally, positive organizational scholarship and positive psychology are movements in the fields of OB and psychology, respectively, that are concerned with enhancing positive subjective experiences (e.g., well-being in the workplace), constructive cognitions about the future (e.g., hope), positive personal traits (e.g., perseverance), and fostering responsible citizenship (see Seligman 2002). Positive ethics is focused on fostering ethical decision-making and behaviors, rather than constraining unethical behaviors (Handelsman et al. 2002).

By building on the above areas of research, an integrative approach is taken to understand the moral nature of work in organizations. First, the theoretical framework offered extends previous research by examining the effect of four types of job-related harm (physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive) on the first three components of the ethical decision-making process (Rest 1986). Rest argued for a sequential ethical decision-making framework in which individuals first recognize the ethical nature of the issue, then engage in a moral reasoning/evaluation process about the situation, form intentions to act, and finally engage in behaviors. We focused on the first three elements of Rest's (1986) framework with an experimental scenario methodology since actual moral behaviors/decisions regarding work design decisions were not available to us.

Second, the framework looks at how the magnitude of consequences (MOC), a characteristic of moral intensity (Jones 1991), may combine with these types of job-related harm to influence ethical reactions. Finally, this research contributes to the literature with a positive ethics approach (Handelsman et al. 2002) that examines individual

difference variables that may *facilitate* the relation between the types of harm (experience with carpal tunnel syndrome [CTS], experience with layoffs, ability to read others' emotions [AROEs], and intrinsic motivation orientation [IMO]) and the components of the ethical decision-making process. The theoretical contributions are complemented by investigating the hypothesized relationships using a sample of Chinese business professionals with an experimental methodology that asks participants to evaluate the actions of a manager portrayed in a specific work design scenario. Understanding how Chinese professionals view the ethicality of job-related harms is extremely important for management researchers and practitioners given the number of jobs outsourced to China and its overall role in the global economy (Ma 2010). In the following sections, we examine the literature on potential job-related harms, MOC, and the relevant individual differences in our model. Our guiding theoretical framework is depicted in Fig. 1.

Literature Review

Nature of the Work-Related Harm

Drawing on perspectives in the legal system, Collins' (1989) theoretical typology in the area of organizational harm noted that the *nature of the harm* (physical, economical, or psychological) and the *nature of the harmed* (person vs. non-person) should be important considerations in ethical decision-making. Research in this area is generally supportive of such distinctions. For example, research has investigated the influence of the "nature of the harm" itself (Weber 1996). In his intriguing study of 259 managers, Weber hypothesized and found *independent* effects for both the magnitude of harm and the nature of the harm on the moral reasoning of managers, as measured by Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral development. For the effects of the nature of harm, he found that the degree of physical harm invoked a higher stage of moral reasoning than did either economic or psychological harm. In addition, economic harm was associated with a higher stage of reasoning than psychological harm. The magnitude of the harm was also positively associated with higher levels of reasoning.

Weber's (1996) research represents one of the first attempts to examine the ideas outlined by Collins (1989) regarding the nature of the harm. The research framework and propositions discussed here extend his initial investigation to the field of work design and examine how distinct types of job-related harm may influence multiple components of Rest's (1986) ethical decision-making process (moral recognition, moral evaluation, and moral intentions). The current research also partitions psychological
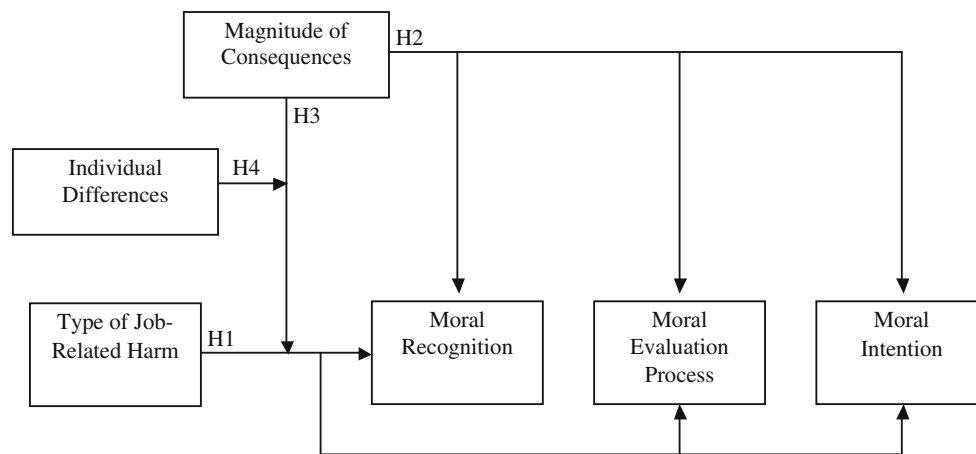
Fig. 1 Theoretical Framework

harm into cognitive and emotional harms in recognition of the growing customer service sector in which employees often have to engage in emotional labor that can cause emotional exhaustion from regularly hiding negative felt emotions from demanding customers (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002). Such emotional harm is fundamentally different than boredom at work due to performing simple work that is not challenging (i.e., cognitive harm). Thus, we sought to understand psychological harm in the workplace in a more nuanced manner that has different implications for managers designing jobs. Finally, we explored how experimental manipulations of MOC may interact with the four forms of job-related harm to impact individuals' ethical decision-making processes.

Work Design Research

The physical welfare of employees is the most basic requirement of meaningful work and has been recognized by many researchers as a key ethical issue in the work place both domestically and internationally (Fusilier et al. 1996; Guvenli and Sanyal 2002). Researchers in the work design area have shown how the ergonomic qualities of the workplace, including the design of jobs, equipment, and environments to match the capabilities and limitations of people, have significant consequences for the health of employees (May and Schwoerer 1994; McCoy 2002). May and Schwoerer noted that poor ergonomic design in jobs is often associated with increased numbers and severity of cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs). CTDs are "a class of musculoskeletal disorders involving damage to the tendons or tendon sheaths, and related bones, muscles, and nerves of the hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck, and back" (1994, p. 862). CTDs are most common among employees whose work involves repetitive, often forceful, physical motions and can be physically debilitating for

someone who must perform such work over long periods of time if symptoms go untreated by medical personnel. Employees at Foxconn Technology, one of China's largest employers, are reported to have to stand all day, sit in backless chairs and crouch next to machinery, with a result being that their legs often swell so much they "waddle" when they walk (Duhigg and Barboza 2012). These employees are often not able to physically rest and recuperate as they work extreme amounts of overtime and often every day of the week.

Meaningful work also involves a number of core job dimensions, such as the use of a variety of skills (skill variety), the completion of a "whole" task from beginning to end (task identity), performing a job that has significance to others (task significance), the opportunity to exercise discretion in work-related decisions (autonomy), and feedback from just performing the job itself (job feedback) (Oldham and Hackman 2010). The literature on what constitutes meaningful work for employees also often includes the opportunity for self-expression, sufficient challenges, and opportunities to develop one's potential (Bowie 1998; May 2004; Pratt and Ashforth 2003). Thus, within this paradigm of work design, jobs that *lack* these components often are associated with cognitive harm that may result in apathy, boredom, dissatisfaction, and disengagement from work, which lead to poor performance and turnover (e.g., Rich et al. 2010; Thomas and Velthouse 1990). In a recent study using a sample of 372 manufacturing workers in China, results showed that factors intrinsic to the employees' jobs accounted for occupational stressors that were negatively related to self-reported mental well-being (Siu 2002).

Meaningful work also demands an appropriate level and type of emotional engagement in one's work. A growing number of researchers have recently investigated the outcomes associated with the degree to which jobs involve

"emotional labor" (cf. Morris and Feldman 1996). Emotional labor is defined as the "effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal interactions" (Morris and Feldman 1996, p. 987). Dimensions of emotional labor include: (a) the frequency of emotional display; (b) the required level of attentiveness to display rules, which entails the duration of the emotional display and the intensity of the display; (c) the variety of emotions required to be expressed; and (d) the emotional dissonance experienced between employees' "real" feelings and the job's emotional display requirements. The primary theorized consequence of emotional labor at work is emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is thought to cause alienation from one's genuine feelings (Hochschild 1983), a depletion of energy, increased withdrawal behavior, and even decreased productivity (Jackson et al. 1986). Research findings specific to job-focused emotional labor, in which the job dictates the displayed emotions, have shown that displaying positive emotions was related to a sense of personal accomplishment whereas hiding negative emotions was related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Brotheridge and Grandy 2002). Results from a study of 392 Chinese human service workers demonstrated that emotional dissonance was positively related to burnout, composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Cheung and Tang 2007).

Finally, core aspects of meaningful work are job security and sufficient wages (Bowie 1998). Loss of financial security can occur through organizational restructuring efforts that result in employees being laid off. Employees will vary in the degree to which they are able to cope with such events depending on their savings and the availability of jobs based on their current skills. Thus, organizational restructuring has the potential to create ethical challenges for organizations. Indeed, researchers have been wrestling with how to best handle layoffs in the most ethical way possible. The severity of the financial impact and length of unemployment are often used as measures of the consequences of a layoff (e.g., Eby and Buch 1998) and will be used here to capture the variance in potential outcomes to laid off employees. Layoffs can occur in businesses in any country and because the wages of Chinese workers are often quite low, employees in China are particularly prone to experience financial hardship should they lose their jobs. These financial hardships are evident in organizations and may be quite significant. In January 2012, the Associated Press reported that employees at the Wuhan Foxconn plant manufacturing Xbox consoles threatened to jump from the building's roof to rebel against significant financial harm the employees would experience from closing the plant.

Job-Related Harm and Ethical Decision-Making

Collins' (1989) typology of organizational harms categorized the possible nature of harms into physical, economic, and psychological based on the condemnation normally received in the legal system. He maintained that physical harm was the most egregious, followed by economic harm, and then psychological harm. Based on Collins' (1989) work, Weber (1996) predicted and found that a life/death situation (physical harm) yielded higher moral reasoning than one dealing with an illegal financial transaction (economic harm), and a situation dealing with an individual's reputation (psychological harm) produced the lowest level of moral reasoning. The current study builds on this previous work by exploring the effects of harm on components of the ethical decision-making process (moral recognition, moral evaluation, and moral intention). Further, we decouple "psychological" harm into *emotional* and *cognitive* forms of harm using the job design literature discussed above.

Based on Collins' (1989) theoretical work and Weber's (1996) initial findings, we expect that the *physical* harm caused by poor ergonomic job design should be recognized as the *most* moral issue when compared to the other forms of job-related harm. Furthermore, physical harm should trigger individuals to more thoroughly evaluate the moral dimensions of the harm and to intend to act in a moral manner. The *economic* or financial harm that comes about from a layoff in the context of little savings and few job opportunities is likely to be seen by respondents as the next most ethical issue and to generate the corresponding levels of moral evaluations and moral intentions. We postulate that *emotional* harm is likely to be seen as the third most moral issue since emotions are considered a core aspect of human well-being. Negative emotional experiences at work and subsequent burnout carry a great deal of weight in employees' decisions to leave organizations. Finally, we would expect that while the simplicity of the job and the lack of challenging opportunities for personal growth and development are important, such *cognitive* harm issues are the least likely to be framed by participants as ethical issues. Thus, we would also expect the lowest corresponding levels of moral evaluation and intention to act morally when faced with situations that pose simple, boring tasks with no challenge or growth opportunities. Based on these arguments, our first hypothesis states:

Hypothesis 1 The type of job-related harm will influence the elements of the ethical decision-making process: (a) moral recognition, (b) moral evaluation, and (c) moral intention. Specifically, we expect that the level of the moral components will vary from highest to lowest for physical,

economic, emotional, and cognitive job-related harm, respectively.

Magnitude of Consequences and Ethical Decision-Making

In a review and extension of the ethical decision-making literature, Jones (1991) suggested that the characteristics of the ethical issue influence every component of Rest's (1986) moral decision-making process. Collectively known as moral intensity, the issue characteristics included MOC, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect.

In one of the first major tests of Jones' (1991) work on moral intensity, Morris and McDonald (1995) found that two dimensions of moral intensity, the MOC and perceived social consensus, had the greatest impact on individuals' moral judgments. Other research has confirmed the relative importance of these two dimensions of moral intensity (Chia and Mee 2000; Frey 2000; Harrington 1997; Singer and Singer 1994; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). While Jones (1991) included the notion of social consensus as a characteristic of a moral issue, others have argued that it is better characterized as part of the social context within an organization (Flannery and May 2000). Thus, the current framework focuses on the influence of the MOC from different job-related harms on individuals' moral recognition, moral evaluation, and moral intention. Overall, evidence exists that the effects of moral intensity on the dimensions of Rest's (1986) framework that have been found in US samples will be similar in Chinese samples. We review some of the extant research below.

Moral Recognition

Research has generally supported the relation between the severity of consequences and moral recognition (e.g., Butterfield et al. 2000; Chia and Mee 2000; Dukerich et al. 2000; Frey 2000; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). For example, in a scenario study with business individuals in Singapore, Chia and Mee (2000) found that MOC was related to moral recognition. In a study of 40 managers who described moral problems, Dukerich et al. (2000) found that the MOC was one of the distinguishing moral intensity dimensions for moral versus non-moral problems. Butterfield et al.'s (2000) study of competitive intelligence practitioners found that MOC influenced moral awareness of ethical problems. Frey (2000) used experimental scenarios among business managers and owners in New Zealand and found that MOC was important in determining the participants' recognition of the ethical content of the decision. O'Fallon and Butterfield (2005) affirm this relationship in their review of ethical decision-making studies.

Most recently, Yang and Wu (2009) examined the influence of moral intensity on the ethical decision-making of Chinese accounting students and found that the potential harm construct (composed of MOC, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, and concentration of effect) was related to moral recognition in four accounting related scenarios.

Moral Evaluations

Work on the relation of MOC to moral evaluation processes that are based in the philosophical traditions of utilitarianism, deontological principles, rights, and justice is much more limited than the relation to moral recognition. Utilitarianism is a teleological evaluation process that is centered on the principle that an individual should choose the action that offers the greatest good for the greatest number (Ferrell et al. 1989). Deontological moral evaluation processes involve consideration of the moral obligations, duties, and rights that are salient in a situation in order to select the proper ethical action (De George 1999). May and Pauli (2002) found that *more* severe consequences were related to *lower* levels of philosophical formulations (procedural and distributive justice, utilitarian, and deontological). It may be that individuals find less need to consider the ethical dimensions of an issue when truly severe consequences may result. In a study of information systems professionals given an email monitoring situation, findings showed that the MOC did not directly influence the level of moral evaluations (Pauli and May 2002). However, in the same study, the MOC did interact with accountability to influence both utilitarian and deontological reasoning. Individuals reported greater moral considerations when they were held accountable for their decisions by their supervisor. With little accountability, they reported decreased moral consideration. Findings from another recent study of a CTS situation showed that MOC was positively related to principle-based evaluations, but not to utilitarian evaluations (Mencl and May 2009). Given the little research that has been conducted, more research is needed on philosophical foundations in different contexts using all three forms of philosophical-based evaluation processes (utilitarian, principle-based, and justice) to better understand the theoretical and empirical relation with these evaluation processes.

Moral Intentions

Finally, relatively few studies have addressed the MOC and ethical intention relation. Jalajas (1993) found that the MOC did *not* influence students' cheating intentions. However, Singhapakdi et al. (1996), Harrington (1997), and Flannery and May (2000) all found that more severe

consequences were positively associated with ethical intentions among marketing, information systems, and environmental professionals, respectively. Using a Chinese sample of accounting students, Yang and Wu (2009) documented that potential harm was related to moral intentions for four profession-relevant situations. Vitell and Patwardhan (2008) also found that potential harm was significantly related to intentions for both Chinese and European samples. For samples of both Chinese and US marketing managers, moral intensity was related to moral judgments, which were, in turn, related to moral intentions (Singh et al. 2007). Work by Watley and May (2004) in a job-related harm context found that consequences influenced moral intentions when personal information or prior knowledge of the injury was available to the general manager. Mencl and May (2009) did not find consequences directly influenced moral intentions using a similar repetitive injury context among a sample of human resource managers; rather physical proximity moderated the relation between consequences and intentions. Because of these mixed findings and the relatively little emphasis on moral intentions, researchers have called for more empirical research on moral intensity and ethical intentions (Loe et al. 2000). This research study answers that call by examining both direct and interaction effects of MOC.

Given that the research discussed above by previous scholars has generally found that the severity of job-specific ethical issues in a variety of different fields has been linked to intentions, we expect that the MOC of the more general job-related harm categories explored here should be related to moral intentions. We maintain that the severity of each of the job-related harms categories should be enough to meet a threshold at which point individuals will recognize them as moral issues in the workplace, reason about the moral dimensions, and intend to act to correct the harm. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2 MOC will be positively related to: (a) moral recognition, (b) moral evaluation, and (c) moral intention.

Next, we expect that the MOC may also influence (moderate) the predicted relation between the type of job-related harm and the three components of the ethical decision-making process. It is *not* likely that the same hierarchical pattern of results for type of harm (i.e., physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive) will emerge when the severity of the consequences is taken into account. For example, emotional and cognitive job-related harms with severe consequences may not differ much from physical and economic harms with low consequences. As this is a relatively unexplored area with little theory on which to base predictions, we offer only the general hypothesis below:

Hypothesis 3 The MOC will influence the relation between the type of job-related harm and the components of the ethical decision-making process: (a) moral recognition, (b) moral evaluation, and (c) moral intention.

Individual Differences, Magnitude of Consequences, and Job-Related Harm

Finally, consistent with a person–situation interactionist perspective on ethical decision-making (Trevino 1986), the theoretical framework offered here recognizes that individual difference variables may play a moderating role in the ethical decision-making process. Specifically, this research takes a positive approach to ethics (e.g., Handelsman et al. 2002) by investigating individual differences that may *facilitate* the ethical decision-making process when individuals are faced with consequences from different forms of job-related harm. Since differences in individuals' backgrounds and experiences are likely to impact which issues are *salient* and *vivid* to them (Jones 1991; Fiske and Taylor 1984), some issues will "stand out" or be more "emotionally interesting." The research here explores a unique individual difference for each type of job-related harm. These individual differences are discussed below.

Experience with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

First, we expect that individuals vary in the extent to which they have workplace experience with CTDs and CTS, in particular. Workers in specific industrial and office settings that demand frequent repetitive movements are more prone to such injuries. Some organizations have policies and procedures for dealing with repetitive strain injuries while others do not. Recent research has demonstrated that prior knowledge about CTS can indeed affect respondents' ethical intentions in a work context (Watley and May 2004). Thus, we hypothesize that experience with CTS will raise the salience and vividness of consequences associated with *physical* job-related harm.

Experience with Layoffs

Second, we expect that individuals will vary based on their experience level with layoffs. Indeed, much research has focused on the effects of layoffs on survivors as well as layoff victims (Brockner et al. 2004; Bennett et al. 1995). Thus, we were interested in whether the respondents' organizations had guidelines for layoffs, whether they had worked with someone or had a friend who had been laid off, or whether they had actually had to layoff an employee. We posit that such experiences would make individuals sensitive to the *economic* (financial) consequences that can happen as a result of a layoff.

Ability to Read Others' Emotions

Third, we expect that individuals will vary in the degree to which they are able to "read" the emotions that others may be experiencing. The ethical decision-making literature has just started to recognize the potential role that emotions may play (Butterfield et al. 2000; Connelly et al. 2004; Gaudine and Thorne 2001; Mencl and May 2009). Of particular interest in this research is how an individual's level of emotional intelligence will affect the ethical decision-making process. We expect that individuals with a high AROEs are more apt to recognize emotional frustration and exhaustion that other employees may experience when encountering belligerent customers compared to individuals with a low AROEs (Jordan et al. 2002). As such, those who are able to perceive employees' emotions in work situations may react more strongly to *emotional* job-related consequences in the workplace.

Intrinsic Motivational Orientation

Finally, work by Amabile et al. (1994) suggests that individuals differ in motivational orientation, which is theorized to be a stable and enduring personality trait. An IMO is thought to be associated with a preference for work that is complex and that provides the job incumbent with opportunities for growth and self-expression. Workers with strong intrinsic motivation have demonstrated relatively high anxiety when they did not have much control in their jobs (Luo 1999). Based on this, it is likely that the respondents' level of IMO will sensitize them to *cognitive* job-related consequences. Based on this discussion of individual differences, the final proposition of the manuscript is offered below:

Hypothesis 4 Individual differences will strengthen the relation between MOC and the components of the ethical decision-making process (moral recognition, evaluation, and intentions) for each type of harm. Specifically, experience with CTS, experience with layoffs, AROEs, and IMO will strengthen the effect of MOC on the ethical decision-making process for physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive job-related harm, respectively.

Methods

Research Design and Participants

The research design consisted of a fully crossed, between-subjects experimental design with four forms of job-related harm (physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive) and two levels of MOC (low and high). Participants read a brief scenario that included manipulations of *one* form of job-related harm with *either* a low or high MOC (i.e., one scenario out of eight total scenarios). They then responded to a number of survey items that assessed only the following variables: the ethical decision-making variables (moral intentions, moral evaluations, and moral recognition); the hypothesized individual difference moderators (experience with CTS, experience with layoffs, AROEs, and IMO); the control variables (social desirability and the ethical climate of their own organization); and demographics (gender, age, education, organization tenure, organization size, and industry). Consistent with recommendations by international scholars (e.g., Sekaran 1983), the survey questions were translated into Chinese by one of the study's researchers, which were then back-translated by a different person.

The data were collected via a web-based survey from working professionals in a variety of jobs and organizations in China. One of the study's researchers had access to approximately 100 employees in a consulting firm as well as a network of managers in an Executive MBA program within a university in China. The researcher contacted all potential participants using their work email addresses with the online link to the survey. The predetermined objective was to collect a minimum of 25 respondents per group (eight scenarios, or groups) to ensure a sufficient number of usable surveys could be retained in order to ensure adequate power in which to test the hypotheses after data screening (Simmons et al. 2011).

Surveys were obtained from 227 individuals; however, the number of respondents who completed all items for the variables in the hypothesized model and the control variables equaled 185 (i.e., 81 % of those who started the survey completed all items for all key variables). Five of these participants did not complete the demographic section of the survey. Based on demographic information reported, participants worked in industries that included consulting, education, manufacturing, retail, government, distribution, and information technology. The self-reported mean size of the organizations was 1,182 employees, and respondents had worked for their organizations for an average of 3.60 years. The mean age was 27.87 years and 63.54 % were male. Ninety percent had completed either a Bachelor's degree (50.8 %) or Master's degree or more (38.7 %).

Measures

Types of Job-Related Harm

Experimental scenarios were designed for each of the four types of job-related harm (physical, economic, emotional, and cognitive). Each of the scenarios stated

that Pat is the manager who made a work design decision related to the situation based on one type of harm that could affect an employee. The first scenario, physical harm, drawn from work by Watley and May (2004), focused on the potential outcomes to an employee who is experiencing symptoms of CTS. The second scenario, economic harm, dealt with the potential consequences for an employee facing an impending layoff. The third scenario, emotional harm, centered on the emotional outcomes for an employee who must deal with a difficult customer. Finally, the last scenario, cognitive harm, dealt with the consequences of having a job that does not fully utilize an employee's talents and abilities. See Appendix for the precise English wording of each of these job-related harm scenarios. The Chinese translations of the scenarios were literal translations of the words in the scenarios.

Magnitude of Consequences

Each of the scenarios varied in severity of the consequences for the employee involved, either low (mild) or high (severe) consequences. For example, the economic harm scenario varied from a layoff situation in which the manager Pat "recognizes that there is an abundance of jobs available in the marketplace demanding the employee's skills, thus the layoff would have little impact on the employee's finances" (*low consequences*) to one in which the manager Pat "recognizes that there are few jobs available in the marketplace and that this layoff will seriously affect the livelihood of this individual. The employee would be forced to file bankruptcy, thus permanently affecting his/her credit" (*high consequences*). Each of the scenario consequence manipulations is outlined in the Appendix.

Moral Recognition

Moral recognition was measured with four items ($\alpha = .83$) adapted from previous research (Singhapakdi et al. 1996; Vitell and Hunt 1990): "The scenario involves an ethical problem; Pat was faced with an ethical issue; The scenario posed ethical issues; Ethical issues had to be considered by Pat in the decision" (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree).

Moral Evaluation

In the moral evaluation process the participants engaged were measured with 11 items ($\alpha = .93$) adapted from previous research (Hansen 1992; May and Pauli 2002; Pauli and May 2002) that represented four philosophical traditions in the field: utilitarianism, principle-based,

procedural justice, and distributive justice. *Utilitarian* moral evaluations were measured with three items: "Pat's decision was in the best interest for everyone in the company; Pat's decision accounted for the benefits and costs for all employees; The overall impact of Pat's decision on the organization was positive." *Principled-based* moral evaluations were measured with two items: "Pat thought about how her decision might be applied to anyone in such a situation; Pat's decision considered her obligations to ensure the employee's well-being." *Procedural justice* moral evaluations were measured with three items: "The way Pat made the decision was fair; Pat's decision-making process was fair; The method used to make Pat's decision was fair." *Distributive justice* moral evaluations were measured with three items: "The effects of Pat's decision were equitably distributed among those impacted; The outcomes of Pat's decision were fair; The consequences of Pat's decision were fairly distributed among those affected." All items were measured on a Likert scale, 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

Moral Intention

Moral intentions were measured with four items ($\alpha = .77$) adapted from May and Pauli (2002) and followed recommendations by ethics researchers on the use and working of scenarios in business ethics research (Hunt and Vitell 1986; Weber and Gillespie 1998): "I would act in the same manner as Pat did in the scenario; I would not say anything to the employee (reverse-coded); I would meet with the employee if I was Pat; If I was Pat, I would talk to the employee" (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree).

Discriminant Validity

A factor analysis using principal axis with oblimin rotation was conducted to determine the discriminant validity of the components of the ethical decision-making process (4 moral recognition items, 14 moral evaluation items, and 4 moral intention items). Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 emerged from the analysis, but three moral evaluation items cross-loaded with the moral intention items (two principle-based evaluation items and one utilitarian evaluation item). After removing these three items, all of the moral recognition, moral evaluation, and moral intention items loaded on the appropriate factors. The three factors accounted for 61.69 % of the total variance.

Individual Differences

All participants provided responses to the individual difference items that comprised the study's moderators.

Experience with CTS was measured as the mean of four items: "Does your current organization have guidelines for dealing with repetitive strain injuries (e.g., CTS)? Have you ever referred an employee to a physician for CTS? Have you worked closely with someone who experienced a work-related injury or illness? Do you have a close friend or family member who has experienced a work-related injury or illness?" (Yes = 1; No = 2). *Experience with layoffs* was measured as the mean of four items: "Does your current organization have guidelines for dealing with organizational layoffs? Have you ever laid off an employee? Have you worked closely with someone who was laid off? Do you have a close friend or family member who was laid off?" (Yes = 1; No = 2). *AROEs* was measured with three items adapted from Jordan et al. (2002) ($\alpha = .86$): "I am able to describe accurately the way employees are feeling; When I talk to employees I can gauge their reactions from their facial expressions; I take notice of the mood my employees are in" (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree). *IMO* was measured with 15 items ($\alpha = .79$) drawn from Amabile et al. (1994). Sample items include: "The more difficult the problem, the more I enjoy trying to solve it; I enjoy tackling problems that are completely new to me; It is important to me to be able to do what I most enjoy" (1 = never or almost never true of me; 4 = always or almost always true of me).

Control Variables

The analyses presented below controlled for two variables that might influence the dependent variables in the study. First, research notes that social desirability should be controlled for when studying ethical decision-making (Randall and Gibson 1990; Weber 1992). To this end, social desirability was assessed with the ten impression management items ($\alpha = .72$) from Paulhus' (1989) impression management subscale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding. Second, research has found that organizational ethical climates can have an effect on the ethical decision-making of individuals (Flannery and May 2000; Loe et al. 2000; Treviño et al. 2006). Of particular interest for the current research is the extent to which employees make decisions for business purposes. Therefore, we used the seven items ($\alpha = .75$) from Victor and Cullen's (1988) Ethical Organizational Climate Survey to assess the instrumental ethical climate of the respondent's organization.

Manipulation Checks

A pilot test of the scenarios with US business students indicated that the four types of harm were empirically distinct from one another. We also included manipulation check items in the full survey to determine how the Chinese professionals perceived the scenarios. Individual items were used to assess whether the manipulations were effective. The physical harm manipulation check item was: "The employee was physically harmed." The economic harm manipulation check item was: "The employee was financially affected in this situation." The cognitive harm manipulation check item was: "The employee's position was sufficiently challenging (reverse-coded)." Finally, the emotional harm manipulation check item was: "In the scenario, the employee's emotional well-being was impacted by the customer." The MOC manipulation check item was: "There will be significant harm to the employee in this situation."

The four job-related harm manipulation check items were positively related to their respective harm scenarios at a statistically significant level—physical: $F(3, 181) = 8.86$, $p < .01$; economic: $F(3, 181) = 14.82$, $p < .01$, emotional: $F(3, 181) = 20.91$, $p < .01$; cognitive: $F(3, 181) = 6.66$, $p = .01$. Post-hoc tests were used to determine the extent to which each type of harm was deemed to be distinct from the other three types of harm in each analysis. These results showed that the physical, economic, and emotional types of harms were distinct for each of the respective scenarios. The cognitive scenario was perceived by respondents as distinct from economic and physical harm, but not distinct from physical harm (Subset 1 means: cognitive = 3.62, physical = 3.80; Subset 2 means: economic = 4.48; emotional = 4.67). Although this finding indicates that psychological harm can be distinguished between cognitive and emotional types of harm, it suggests that cognitive harm may be construed as having physical harm effects. The implications arising from this finding are incorporated into the presentation of the results and in the discussion.

The MOC manipulation check item was statistically significant for low/high consequences, $F(1, 181) = 3.95$, $p = .05$. The difference was in the expected direction such that the high consequences manipulation was rated as more severe than the low consequence manipulation.

Results

Descriptives and Intercorrelations

The means, standard deviations (SDs), and intercorrelations for the variables in this research are presented in Table 1. As one can see in the table, individuals reported moderate levels of moral recognition and moral evaluations across all experimental scenarios (M = 4.12 and 4.38, respectively, 7-point scale). The average for moral

intentions was slightly higher at 5.00. Individuals reported relatively little experience with CTS or layoffs ($M = 1.72$ and 1.57 on a scale of $1 =$ Yes, $2 =$ No). Participants tended to agree that they could read others' emotions ($M = 4.76$, 7-point scale) and believed that they were somewhat intrinsically oriented ($M = 2.77$, 4-point scale). The means and SDs of the dependent variables by group are provided in Table 2.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: The Effect of Job-Related Harm on the Ethical Decision-Making Process

This hypothesis stated that harm would influence the components of the ethical decision-making process. ANCOVA tests controlling for ethical climate and impression management showed that type of harm had a statistically significant main effect on moral recognition, $F(3, 175) = 5.40$, $p < .01$, and moral evaluations $F(3, 175) = 4.41$, $p < .01$. Type of harm did *not* have a significant effect on moral intentions, $F(3, 175) = .62$, $p = .60$. These results are presented in the first line of Table 3.

Tests of the paired comparisons (see Table 4) indicate how the levels of each component of the ethical decision-making process vary with respect to the four types of harm. It was hypothesized that physical harm would lead to the most ethicality, followed by the economic, emotional, and cognitive types of harm. For *moral recognition*, the mean of physical harm did not differ from that of economic harm. However, the mean difference between physical harm and emotional harm as well as the mean difference between physical harm and cognitive harm were statistically significant in the predicted direction. Results also support the prediction that economic harm would be greater than emotional and cognitive types of harm. Finally, there was no statistical difference between emotional harm and cognitive harm for moral recognition.

Physical harm was significantly greater than the means for economic, emotional, and cognitive types of harm for *moral evaluations* (see column 2 in Table 4). Contrary to expectations, economic harm was significantly less than emotional harm for moral evaluations. Finally, though emotional harm was greater than cognitive harm for moral evaluations, the difference was not statistically significant.

The mean differences between the types of harm for *moral intentions* were not statistically significant (see column 3 in Table 4), which is not surprising given the non-significant main effect result. Overall, the results ANCOVA test of the paired comparisons for moral recognition, evaluations, and intentions provide partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Physical harm	.27	.45	–													
2 Economic harm	.22	.41	−.32***	–												
3 Emotional harm	.30	.46	−.40***	−.34***	–											
4 Cognitive harm	.22	.41	−.32***	−.28***	−.34***	–										
5 Magnitude of consequences	.53	.50	−.06	−.01	.07	−.01	–									
6 Moral recognition	4.12	1.25	.13*	.23***	−.18**	−.16**	−.01	–								
7 Moral evaluations	4.39	1.14	.23***	−.16**	−.01	−.09	.13**	.12	–							
8 Moral intentions	5.00	1.26	.08	−.03	−.05	.00	.18**	.10	.60***	–						
9 Organizational ethical climate	3.75	.93	.12*	.09	−.09	−.12*	−.10	.13*	.21***	.14**	–					
10 Impression management	4.88	.99	.00	.06	.00	−.05	.06	.02	.12*	.30***	−.01	–				
11 Knowledge of CTS	1.72	.30	.01	−.02	−.07	.09	.03	.10	.32***	.35***	.19**	.21***	–			
12 Experience with layoffs	1.57	.31	−.02	−.02	.02	.06	−.01	.06	.19***	.20***	.22***	.04	.45***	–		
13 Ability to read emotions	4.76	1.18	.06	.06	−.04	−.07	.10	.17**	.35***	.47***	.19***	.40***	.39***	.21***	–	
14 Intrinsic motivation orientation	2.77	.40	.08	.06	.09	−.04	.08	.18***	.18**	.36***	.20***	.38***	.24***	.15**	.48***	–

Note $N = 185$

* $p \leq .10$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .01$

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for the dependent variables by group

Groups	Type of harm	MOC	n	Mean (SD)		
				Moral recognition	Moral evaluation	Moral intention
1	Economic	Low	19	4.67 (1.02)	3.85 (1.22)	4.89 (1.33)
2	Economic	High	21	4.64 (1.46)	4.22 (1.36)	4.96 (1.14)
3	Cognitive	Low	19	3.84 (1.18)	3.81 (1.04)	4.45 (1.38)
4	Cognitive	High	21	3.67 (1.30)	4.55 (1.00)	5.52 (.86)
5	Emotional	Low	23	3.68 (1.23)	4.44 (.96)	4.67 (1.32)
6	Emotional	High	32	3.83 (1.13)	4.33 (.96)	5.07 (1.11)
7	Physical	Low	26	4.37 (.95)	4.61 (1.01)	4.99 (1.35)
8	Physical	High	24	4.40 (1.37)	5.04 (1.30)	5.37 (1.41)
Total	Four types	Two levels	185	4.12 (1.25)	4.39 (1.14)	5.00 (1.26)

Table 3 ANCOVA results for the influence of job-related harm and magnitude of consequences on the ethical decision-making process

	Moral recognition	Moral evaluations	Moral intentions
H1: Type of harm F(df)	5.40*** (3, 175)	4.41*** (3, 175)	.62 (3, 175)
H2: magnitude of consequences F(df)	.01 (1, 175)	5.73** (1, 175)	7.16*** (1, 175)
H3: harm × MOC interaction	.16 (3, 175)	1.40 (3, 175)	1.11 (3, 175)
Model R^2	.10	.16	.17

Ethical climate and impression management are controlled for in these analyses

Note * $p \leq .10$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .01$

Table 4 The influence of type of harm on the ethical decision-making process: paired comparisons (mean differences)

	Moral Recognition	Moral Evaluations	Moral Intentions
Physical–economic	−.28	.80***	.29
Physical–emotional	.59**	.35*	.25
Physical–cognitive	.58**	.53**	.09
Economic–emotional	.87***	−.45*	−.05
Economic–cognitive	.86***	−.28	−.21
Emotional–cognitive	−.01	.17	−.16

This table is based on H1 that the means of moral recognition, moral evaluations, and moral intentions for physical harm will be rated the highest of the four types of harm (represented by the first three comparisons); followed by economic harm as the second highest (represented by the next two comparisons); and emotional as the third highest (represented by the last comparison)

Note * $p \leq .10$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .01$

Hypothesis 2: The Effect of MOC on the Ethical Decision-Making Process

This hypothesis stated that MOC would be positively related to the components of the ethical decision-making process. ANCOVA tests controlling for ethical climate and impression management (see line 2 in Table 3) showed that MOC did not have a statistically significant main effect on moral recognition, $F(1, 175) = .01$, $p = .94$. However, MOC was significantly related to both moral evaluations, $F(1, 175) = 5.73$, $p = .02$, and moral intentions, $F(1, 175) = 7.16$, $p < .01$, in the predicted direction. Thus,

more severe consequences led to higher moral evaluations and moral intentions, providing partial support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: The Interaction Between Job-Related Harm and MOC

According to this hypothesis, the relationships between the type of harm and each component of the ethical decision-making process would vary based on the level of MOC. The ANCOVA results (see line 3 in Table 3) revealed that no such interactions existed with respect to any of the

ethical decision-making variables: moral recognition, $F(3, 175) = .16$, $p = .92$; moral evaluations, $F(3, 175) = 1.40$, $p = .25$; and moral intentions, $F(3, 175) = 1.11$, $p = .35$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 did not receive support.

Hypothesis 4: Individual Differences as Moderators of the Relationships Between MOC and the Ethical Decision-Making Process for Each Type of Harm

This hypothesis addressed the relations between MOC and the components of the ethical decision-making process for the types of job-related harm. Individual difference variables specific to each type of harm were expected to moderate these relationships. To begin with, the subjects who received a given job-related harm manipulation were selected from the dataset. A three-step regression analysis was then used. First, ethical climate and impression management were entered as controls. Second, the MOC and the particular individual difference variable were entered as predictors of the dependent variable. For the relative type of harm, these individual difference variables included: (a) physical harm—experience with CTS, (b) economic harm—experience with layoffs, (c) emotional harm—AROEs, and (d) cognitive harm—IMO. Third, the product of the two predictors was entered. Moderation is evident if this product term has a significant effect on the dependent variable while controlling for the predictors that were entered in the previous step (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Results of the regression analyses (see Table 5) showed that experience with layoffs marginally moderated the relationships between MOC and moral evaluations for economic harm, $\beta = -1.45$, $t(5, 34) = -1.80$, $p = .08$. IMO moderated the relationship between MOC and moral evaluations for cognitive harm, $\beta = -2.47$, $t(5, 34) = -2.24$, $p = .03$. No other results showed that these interactions were related to moral recognition or moral intentions. The results for the physical harm—MOC/knowledge of CTS interaction and for the emotional harm—MOC/AROEs were not statistically significant.

Using the unstandardized regression coefficients, the form of each statistically significant interaction was depicted graphically using representative low and high values for each of the predictor variables (i.e., 0 or 1 for the dummy coded MOC manipulation and the relevant individual difference variable mean ± 1 SD). The graphical forms of the interactions are depicted in Figs. 2 and 3 to determine whether the results support Hypothesis 4.

The graph of the MOC and experience with layoff interaction shows that individuals who possess lower levels of experience with layoffs were more likely to have their moral evaluation perceptions influenced by the MOC than those with high levels of layoff experience which remained relatively unchanged by the severity of consequences.

Similarly, the relationship between MOC and moral evaluations for the cognitive type of harm was strengthened when IMO was low and changed little when it was high. These graphical results show that the findings do not support Hypothesis 4. The interpretation of all results is provided next in the "Discussion" section.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results of this research do suggest that different forms of job-related harm influence individuals' level of moral recognition. Specifically, physical and economic job-related harm were more likely to be perceived as moral issues than cognitive or emotional harm. Second, respondents' moral evaluations were influenced by both the type of job-related harm and MOC. Physical job-related harm stimulated greater moral evaluations than economic and cognitive job-related harm, but not emotional harm. Third, respondents were also more likely to intend to act ethically when MOC was high rather than low. Finally, findings revealed that experience with layoffs and IMO helped explain individuals' moral evaluations for economic and cognitive job-related harm, respectively. AROEs had a direct influence on moral intentions, but did not help explain respondents' reactions to emotional job-related harm.

Integration with Previous Literature

#### Type of Job-Related Harm

The research described here contributes to the extant literature by building on the theoretical typology work of Collins (1989) and extending it through integration of the job design literature in organizational behavior to differentiate "psychological" harm into emotional and cognitive forms. This research builds on Weber's (1996) initial work at testing Collins' ideas by examining three components of Rest's (1986) ethical decision-making model. Further, while Weber (1996) examined the moral reasoning level associated with different types of scenarios, the current research examined moral evaluations based on the philosophical traditions of utilitarianism, principles/rights, and justice. Weber's research confirmed the proposed rank ordering of physical, economic, and psychological harm on moral reasoning scores. In the current research, moral evaluations for physical job-related harm were greater than for economic and cognitive forms of harm, but did not differ significantly from those for emotional job-related harm. Emotional job-related harm was only greater than

Table 5 Summary of regression analyses for the moderator effects of individual differences on the magnitude of consequences effect on the ethical decision-making process for each type of job-related harm
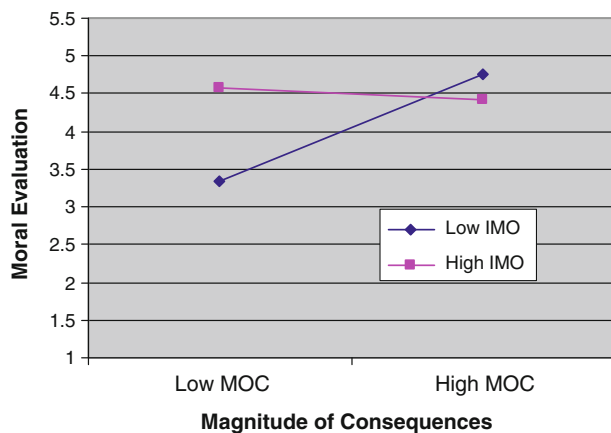
	Moral recognition			Moral evaluations			Moral intentions		
	β	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	β	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	β	R^2	$R^2\Delta$
Physical harm ($n = 50$)									
Step 1 (controls)		.03	.03		.22	.22***		.14	.14**
Ethical climate	.16			.31**			.15		
Social desirability	.04			.28**			.31*		
Step 2 (predictors)		.05	.02		.29	.07		.19	.03
MOC dummy	−.77			.72			1.19		
Experience w/CTS	−.07			.24			.29		
Step 3 (moderation)		.06	.01		.30	.01		.21	.02
MOC × CTS	.82			−.46			−1.00		
Step 3 $F(5, 44)$	.56, $p = .73$			3.70, $p < .01$			2.38, $p = .05$		
Economic harm ($n = 40$)									
Step 1 (controls)		.05	.05		.02	.02			
Ethical climate	.21			.31			.14		
Social desirability	−.08			−.15			.13		
Step 2 (predictors)		.07	.02		.08	.06			
MOC dummy	−.38			1.67			1.25		
Experience w/layoffs	−.02			.25			.18		
Step 3 (moderation)		.08	.01		.16	.08*			
MOC × Experience w/layoffs	.49			−1.45*			−1.23		
Step 3 $F(5, 34)$	.59, $p = .71$			1.31, $p = .28$			.77, $p = .58$		
Emotional harm ($n = 55$)									
Step 1 (controls)		.04	.04		.04	.04			
Ethical climate	−.18			.19			.17		
Social desirability	−.13			−.03			.20		
Step 2 (predictors)		.07	.03		.22	.18***			
MOC dummy	−.39			−.78			−.19		
Ability to read others' emotions	.03			.29			.40**		
Step 3 (moderation)		.08	.01		.25	.03			
MOC × AROE	.49			.74			.30		
Step 3 $F(5, 49)$	.84, $p = .53$			3.32, $p = .01$			5.72, $p < .01$		
Cognitive harm ($n = 40$)									
Step 1 (controls)		.08	.08		.04	.04			.11
Ethical climate	.11			−.08			−.08		
Social desirability	−.02			.12			.16		
Step 2 (predictors)		.15	.07		.17	.13*			.23***
MOC dummy	.32			2.64**			1.94*		
Intrinsic motivation orientation	.40			.57**			.61**		
Step 3 (moderation)		.15	.00		.27	.10**			.05
MOC × IMO	−.51			−2.47**			−1.67		
Step 3 $F(5, 34)$	1.24, $p = .31$			2.55, $p = .05$			4.32, $p < .01$		

β values are those from Step 3, with all variables entered into the equation

Note * $p \leq .10$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .01$
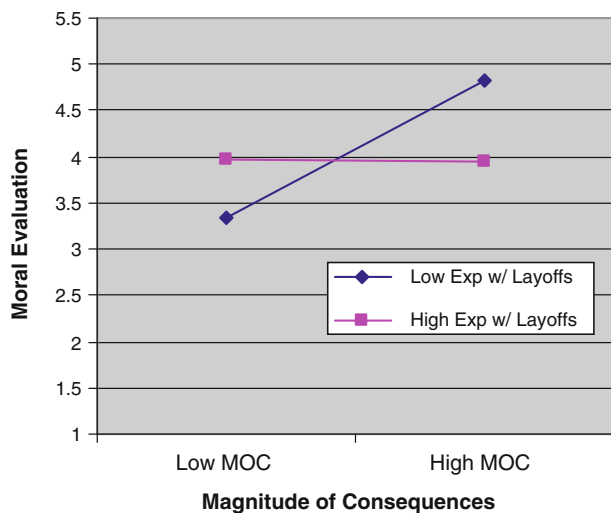
Fig. 2 Graph of interaction effect between magnitude of consequences (MOC) and experience with layoffs for economic harm on moral evaluations

Fig. 3 Graph of interaction effect between magnitude of consequences (MOC) and intrinsic motivation orientation (IMO) for cognitive harm on moral evaluations

economic job-related harm. The physical job-related harm results are consistent with research on Chinese workers showing that physical harm is positively related to job satisfaction and mental well-being (Lu et al. 2003). The findings for emotional job-related harm may be due to the cultural differences between Weber's US sample and the Chinese sample in the current research. As Chinese culture tends to be categorized as "neutral" as opposed to "affective" in the treatment and display of emotions (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), the difficulties involved in the emotional labor and exhaustion of the emotional harm scenario may have caused the Chinese managers in the current study to deeply ponder the ethical ramifications of such harm, resulting in higher levels of moral evaluation.

As noted above, the exploration of the effect of the type of job-related harm on moral recognition and moral intentions extends previous research. The pattern of results for moral recognition demonstrated that individuals were more likely to recognize physical and economic harm as a moral issue than emotional and cognitive harm. This pattern of means for moral recognition is similar to Collins' (1989) typology and Weber's (1996) findings, although some of the mean differences were not significant. It may be that Chinese professionals' work experiences caused them to bundle the harms together (Collins 1989) through the use of implicit theories for how jobs are designed, though the findings are consistent with research findings that Chinese tend to value economic well-being (Lui 1992). Indeed, research suggests that Chinese workers generally view work as the means for earning a living, particularly for the family as a whole, and will tolerate unsatisfactory and environmentally poor conditions if there are adequate financial rewards (Leung 1996). In more recent research on the quality of work life of Chinese workers, the desire for meaningful work that enhances one's self-esteem (cognitive well-being) has been linked to life satisfaction and turnover intentions. Managers would be advised to consider the economic harm implications as the society becomes more affluent.

Unfortunately, the differences in moral evaluations discussed above did not translate into findings for moral intentions as past research on Chinese samples has (Singh et al. 2007). Thus, it is unclear that individuals would be willing to step in to address the needs employees might have if they experience such job-related harms. The Chinese culture may influence that through the in-/out-group biases on such behaviors (Ardichvili et al. 2012; Ma 2010). Future research is needed to investigate various harms in the context of in-/out-groups and in other types of work-related situations such as harm that stems from abusive unethical supervision.

Magnitude of Consequences

The relation of MOC to moral evaluations and behavioral intentions reinforces extant literature on the ethical decision-making process (May and Pauli 2002) and more recent work on the perceived harm construct and moral intentions by Vitell and Patwardhan (2008) using Chinese and European samples. The lack of an influence on moral recognition itself suggests that the experimental manipulations may not have been extreme enough to generate awareness of the moral issue based upon recent labor conditions cited by the Fair Labor Association (FLA 2012). Alternatively, the Chinese participants may simply be more tolerant of the severity of the job-related consequences, and, therefore, less likely to describe such harm as a moral

issue. Research suggests that the Chinese are generally more tolerant as a culture than the US (Rawwas et al. 2004). Future research should examine these same job-related consequences with workers in other cultures to determine if similar findings emerge. It may be that socially progressive cultures such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries are more protective of the human condition at work and workers in those cultures would recognize a broader set of job-related harms as moral issues. Finally, it may be that the highly educated, powerful Chinese professionals are less likely to be able to take the perspective of unknown workers than their peers in other countries would be (Galinsky et al. 2006).

Individual Differences

Findings from the moderator analyses for the individual difference variables revealed that experience with layoffs and IMO contributed to our understanding of the consequences associated with economic and cognitive job-related harm, respectively. The moral evaluations of those who had little experience with layoffs were influenced more by the variance in financial and employment consequences portrayed in the experimental layoff scenario than those individuals with more significant experience. Similarly, those who had a high IMO tended to express relatively high (and consistent) levels of moral evaluations across the consequence manipulations for cognitive harm, while those low in IMO were influenced more substantially by the consequences involved. This pattern of findings for the individual differences is consistent with the effects of personal information on perceptions of MOC in previous research (e.g., Watley and May 2004). When an individual has little information about a person or the situation (i.e., layoff or job challenge), his/her moral evaluations are enhanced when consequential information about the job-related harm is provided. However, when a person has had extensive experience with layoffs or has an appreciation for jobs that provide fulfilling, challenging work, his/her moral evaluations tend to be relatively high and stable. This research contributes more systematically to the literature on work experience and knowledge (Loe et al. 2000) by focusing on specific, relevant experience for the job context. Findings further demonstrate the efficacy of using individual differences as moderators of relations proposed in ethical decision-making models (e.g., Treviño et al. 2006). Our research suggests that such differences might have their greatest effect on the moral evaluations or judgments individuals make.

Finally, the lack of the AROEs as a factor that helps explain participants' reactions to emotional job-related harm may, in part, be due to the fact that the Chinese culture emphasizes on interpersonal harmony as well as self-control of emotions. Thus, Chinese managers might be reluctant to take action toward emotional job-related harm even if they have a strong AROEs at work.

Future Research Directions

First, future research should explore the moral dimensions of harm to the social or relational elements of jobs as these are a key part of new theoretical approaches to job design (Grant 2008; Grant et al. 2010; Oldham and Hackman 2010). Future research should also explore how in some contexts individuals may attempt to adapt and avoid job-related harm by crafting their jobs differently (e.g., Berg et al. 2010).

Second, future research should empirically examine the potential role of different individual differences in models of ethical decision-making in order to better understand the impact and magnitude of individual factors (e.g., Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008). Indeed, the AROEs and IMO may have promise for future work because of their direct influence on moral intentions, a topic that Loe et al. (2000) maintain needs more research attention.

Third, research should follow Davis et al.'s (1998) and Kini et al.'s (2004) examples and investigate whether the relations in the current theoretical framework hold across cultures. It may be that the future time orientation of the Chinese sample here caused them to consider longer term effects than an American sample would. Other cultural differences dealing with emotions, such as the "neutral" orientation of the Chinese (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), may have influenced participants' reactions to the emotional harm scenario. Thus, such cross-cultural contextual factors may have moderating effects on the relation between moral intensity and ethical decision-making components or they may have direct effects on the intensity of the moral issues that emerge in particular contexts (Kelley and Elm 2003; Vitell and Patwardhan 2008).

Fourth, job-related harms that occur to those who are proximate to Chinese managers may be more salient and thus more likely to be recognized as an ethical issue, evaluated and acted upon given the particularistic nature of the country. In-group biases based on the Chinese concept of *guanxi* are strong in such countries (Ma 2010) and are likely to influence ethical perceptions of job-related harm. Thus, future research should use experimental scenarios that ask the individual to consider how they would treat their own employees who experienced the harms examined here. The Chinese cultural value of paternalism (Ardichvili et al. 2012) is likely to positively influence how they care for the harm to their own workers.

Finally, future research should explore the factors that contribute to developing the moral courage to confront management when job-related harms take place in the workplace. Recent theoretical and empirical work on moral courage can

provide some guidance for this research (e.g., Comer and Vega 2011; Hannah et al. 2011; Sekerka et al. 2009).

Implications for Management

One of the main implications for management that emerges from this research is the need to train managers on the types of the consequences that employees may experience as a result of the characteristics of their jobs. Such "framing" is likely to influence how managers approach job-related ethical issues (Weber 1996; Butterfield et al. 2000) as well as how employees react to the managers' decisions. Results suggest that this training might be best targeted at Collins' (1989) "psychological" category, which we decoupled into emotional and cognitive types of harm. The research here demonstrated that managers are less likely to recognize these as moral issues so training that raises the salience of these issues to managers may have the best opportunity to influence recognition of these types of harm. Training may also provide a context for managers to discuss their own preferences for complex tasks and challenge at work (i.e., IMO) to foster moral considerations of the job characteristics for their employees. Given the bourgeoning customer service field, organizations should seek to hire managers who have emotional intelligence so that they are better able to read the emotions of others and understand the emotional consequences of service jobs (e.g., Hochschild 1983; Rafaeli and Sutton 1987). In addition, multinational organizations that offshore jobs to China should be cognizant of how Chinese managers recognize and make decisions about the job-related harms explored here.

Finally, it would also be enlightening for managers to receive training on the workplace dimensions that lead to individuals engaging and flourishing in their work (May et al. 2004). Positive emotions in the workplace serve to "broaden and build" employees' repertoire of actions (Fredrickson 2001). Overall, the virtuous *well-being* of employees (rather than harm) is the focus of leaders who provide positive "visions of abundance" that employees gravitate toward (Whetten and Cameron 2005). This is especially relevant in a global environment in which managers are expected to demonstrate intercultural competencies.

Strengths and Limitations

Each research study conducted has both strengths and limitations. First, one key strength of this research was that it contributed to extant theoretical and empirical work by examining the ethical nature of meaningful work design from a moral intensity perspective. Second, the research was conducted using experimental ethics manipulations. Few previous research studies have used such objective manipulations even though researchers have called for them (e.g., Frey 2000). Furthermore, these standardized

situations in which participants were asked to rate the manager in a scenario help minimize the positive self-serving bias that is often present for predicting one's own ethical behavior. Third, the analyses also established the discriminant validity of the ethical decision-making process components. Nevertheless, the study has its limitations. For example, the study used a mixture of previously existing scenario manipulations and newly created ones for the economic, emotional, and cognitive harm manipulations. Although the manipulations were pilot tested, they were not pre-tested with the Chinese participants. This may account for the fact that the MOC manipulation was only marginally effective in the sample of Chinese professionals. Alternatively, this may be due to cultural differences between the US and China in ethical decision-making and other factors discussed above. Furthermore, lack of statistically significant results may be a function of low power to detect effects due to the relatively small sample size per experimental group. Future research should aim to tease apart the reasons for the current findings. Finally, although the sample was composed of Chinese professionals from a diverse set of industries, the lack of a completely random sample limits its generalizability to all Chinese businesses.

Conclusion

Bowie's (1998) philosophical discussion of meaningful work illustrated many of the ideas from the different approaches to job design that are grounded in organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship. Bowie maintained that one of the moral obligations of the firm is to provide meaningful work to employees. Unfortunately, many managers will not likely see this obligation clearly. It is the hope of these authors that the research described above will provide some insight into the ethical decision-making surrounding particular forms of job design and that managers will take a positive approach that creates opportunities for individuals to *flourish* at work.

Appendix

Experimental Scenarios for Types of Job-Related Harm

Physical Harm

Pat Hanson is the department manager in an organization very similar to yours. Last Monday morning, Pat overheard

an employee in the department, talking about "tingling and numbness in her fingers" and how her hand felt weak when she tried to open a jar over the weekend.

Pat knows that this condition can be caused either by the near-constant typing that dominates the employee's time at work or by the gardening and weeding she's been doing at home. Without attention (*Low Consequence*: Pat knows that this problem sometimes decreases in magnitude and surgery is not required; *High Consequence*: Pat knows that this problem could escalate to the point where surgery would be required. An incision would be made on the inside of the wrist to allow for more space for the swollen nerves. Recovery from surgery is moderately painful and would include physical therapy and restricted work duty for several months. Some patients never completely recover).

After thinking about it, Pat insists that the employee make an appointment to see the company doctor this week.

Economic Harm

Pat Hanson is the department manager in an organization very similar to yours. Last Monday morning, Pat found out that, due to budgetary constraints, Pat may have to layoff an employee in the department.

Pat knows that the employee in the department does not have any savings for such "rainy days." Pat recognizes that there (*Low Consequence*: "is an abundance of jobs available in the marketplace demanding the employee's skills, thus the layoff would have little impact on the employee's finances;" *High Consequence*: "are few jobs available in the marketplace and that this layoff will seriously affect the livelihood of this individual. The employee would be forced to file bankruptcy, thus permanently affecting his/her credit)."

After thinking about it, Pat decides to tell the employee about the potential downsizing.

Emotional Harm

Pat Hanson is the department manager in an organization very similar to yours. Last Monday morning, Pat overheard an employee in the department, interacting with a difficult customer.

Pat knows that the employee has trouble dealing with belligerent customers. The employee often gets very angry in such situations and stays that way for an extended period of time. In this particular situation (*Low Consequence*: "the customer was tactfully questioning the company's return policy and attempting to convince the employee to allow the return;" *High Consequence*: "The customer was yelling at the employee about the company's return policy and was blowing the issue completely out of proportion. This

intense face-to-face customer interaction caused the employee to become extremely upset, unable to concentrate for the rest of the day, and feeling totally drained").

After thinking about it, Pat decides to step in and assist the employee in resolving the issue.

Cognitive Harm Scenario

Pat Hanson is the department manager in an organization very similar to yours. Last Monday morning, Pat overheard an employee in the department talking about whether or not his/her job allows the employee to fully develop his/her potential.

Pat knows that the employee has more talents and abilities than are needed by his/her current position. (*Low Consequence*: "The employee tells his/her co-worker that the job involves opportunities for challenging work;" *High Consequence*: "The employee tells his/her co-worker that the job is intolerable and only involves mind-numbingly simple work.")

After thinking about it, Pat decides to have a career development planning session with the employee.

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