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THE EMERGENCE OF MORAL LEADERSHIP

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The emergence of "moral leadership," discussed here as a situation wherein individuals take a moral stance on an issue, convince others to do the same, and together spur change in a moral system, abounds in practice. Existing ethical and moral leadership theories, however, have remained confined to micro-level behavioral research. Therefore, in this paper, we develop a process theory of the socially situated emergence of moral leadership and its development into a broader movement affecting moral systems within and across formal organizations. We theorize the pathways through which moral leadership emerges; the triggers that bring about moral awareness and the moral courage to offer an alternative moral stance toward an issue, and leaders' ability to deftly connect followers and their moral convictions into a broader movement, such that a moral system changes from within. With our process theory, we bridge between micro and macro levels of analysis, and highlight the crucial ability of leaders to be both principled and pragmatically savvy, and thus capable of bridging between their own moral convictions and those of others in order to develop a common and mutually binding ground toward change.

Recent years have witnessed plenty of positive examples in which formal and informal leaders have inspired and mobilized others to take a moral stance with regard to issues affecting their organizations and society at large. Think, for instance, of leaders challenging an organization's modes of thinking and acting around unsustainable energy production (Gond, Barin Cruz, Raufflet, & Charron, 2016), equal rights for women in the workplace (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007), perceived violations of human dignity (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, & Scully, 2010; Guynn, 2018; Shaban, 2018), or unsustainable food production practices (Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008). Typically, such change is spurred by individuals who emerge as informal leaders and who seek to overhaul a moral system from within. In some cases, such reform-oriented initiatives will lead to the development of new organizational subcommunities (Gutierrez et al., 2010), or to even completely new organizations that swell into movements (Pless, 2007; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015; Weber et al., 2008). Yet, there are also more local examples of informal leaders who emerge in organizations to gradually change the moral system from within and manage to initiate organizational-level changes (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Such examples include David Berdish of Ford Motor Company initiating a new morally charged code of conduct within the automotive industry and Kevin Thompson's (IBM) efforts to establish a communal ethos through citizenship initiatives within the technology industry (see Davis & White, 2015).

These and other recent examples of moral leadership indicate that individuals may disrupt the moral fabric of organizations and society by taking organizational members and other stakeholders along in embracing an alternative moral view of issues. In fact, by creating such "value-infused" organizations (Selznick, 1957), individuals who become moral leaders realize their own and others' ideological pursuits for a better world, and may, in the process, mobilize their employees and other stakeholders to take corrective action regarding social grievances and identified moral shortfalls or transgressions (Benford & Snow, 2000). Although examples and case studies of moral leadership and value infusion in organizations in fact abound (starting with Selznick, 1957), the subject has only recently been receiving

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more focused research attention (Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013; Kraatz, Ventresca, & Deng, 2010; Voronov & Weber, 2016).

While there is a literature at the micro level on individual moral intuitions in organizations (e.g., Haidt, 2012; Weaver, Reynolds, & Brown, 2014) and on the behavioral qualities of "ethical leaders" (e.g., Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018; Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, 2019) and "responsible" CEOs (Maak & Pless, 2006), the theory development in this body of work remains limited to formal, generalized descriptions of the ethical qualities or behaviors of individual leaders. While leadership studies focusing on CEOs and captains of industry indeed suggest a connection with strategic, organization-level processes (e.g., Maak, Pless, & Voegtlin, 2016), the leadership literature at large tends to obscure the wider institutional context within which processes of moral leadership emerge (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014).

Disconnected from this body of work, there is at the same time an emerging macro literature on "values work" that deals with the disruption, creation, and maintenance of values at an organizational level (Gehman et al., 2013; Kraatz et al., 2010; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015). For its part, this stream of research is attentive to the change of value regimes, but, to date, has largely featured inductive theorizing based on case studies of organizations as opposed to more systematic and formal theory development across levels of analysis. Considering both sets of literatures, we argue that, as a field, we still lack an integrated theoretical understanding that links micro and macro levels of analysis and specifies how the process of moral leadership unfolds, and how, through a decisive influence on others, this form of leadership swells into a broader movement that changes the moral system from within. We therefore theorize in this paper about the specific conditions and processes that are involved in the situated emergence and development of moral leadership within and beyond formal organizations.

With our theory development, we thus contribute to the existing management literature by pulling the phenomenon of leadership out of its "straitjacket" of micro-level research and by integrating this literature with (macro) institutional approaches to morality. We thus blend and integrate both streams of work into an integrative process theory of moral leadership that suggests that the meaning and function of moral leadership can only be understood in relational terms as something that is performed and enacted in the context of more or less institutionalized moral systems in organizations. We develop this theory into a process model of the initiation, development, and maintenance of moral leadership with key steps formalized into testable propositions. The model and propositions may form the center point for further cross-disciplinary research on moral leadership, as well as provide a base for extended theory development within subsequent leadership and organizational research. As such, we foresee, in line with our integrative ambitions, a number of emergent theoretical and methodological opportunities for further research.

The paper is structured as follows. We first synthesize past research on ethical forms of leadership, and position ourselves in between micro organizational behavior and macro organizational and institutional traditions of research. We draw in concepts from micro and macro streams of research on moral intuitions, framing, and social movements and develop an integrated theoretical base for our theory development. Then, in the subsequent two sections, we unfold our arguments and theoretical propositions regarding the emergence of moral leadership. We close with a brief discussion of the implications of this theory for future research.

CONCEPTUALIZING MORAL LEADERSHIP

Prior Research on Ethical Leadership

According to the organizational behavior literature, ethical leaders are described as honest, trustworthy, and fair; they treat followers with respect and care, do not have favorites, keep promises, allow followers to have input and share in decisions, and clarify their expectations and responsibilities (see Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003). Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) argued that ethical leaders act both as a "moral person" (in being benevolent, honest, and caring toward employees) and as a "moral manager" by being a credible role model and by installing rewards and punishments for complying with ethical norms, standards, and procedures (see Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). The question, however, is whether these behaviors fully reflect what it means to be an ethical leader in the context of an organization. Fehr, Yam, and Dang (2015), for example, suggested that the "moral person" facet of the ethical leadership construct presently captures only a narrow slice of the moral domain—generally, a leader's trustworthiness and prosociality—while failing to highlight those processes that give a leader's actions moral weight in a particular social context. Paradoxically,

there is evidence that the present emphasis on rule following and compliance in the "moral management" part of ethical leadership can be experienced as overly controlling and judgmental toward followers (Stouten, van Dijke, Mayer, De Cremer, & Euwema, 2013). It thus appears, from the perspective of organizational behavior research, that more theory is needed to account for such paradoxical effects, and that moral leadership may be a broader concept than previously assumed.

In an attempt to start to address such limitations and allow for a broader definition of moral leadership, Fehr et al. (2015) outlined the role of followers in "moralizing" leader behaviors and defined "ethical leadership" as the demonstration and promotion of behavior that is positively "moralized" *by others*—and by followers in particular—in that it is perceived as more or less morally right. Regarding moralization, the authors contended that an observer's perception of behavior is a matter of "right and wrong," whereby positive moralization means perceiving a given behavior as being "the right" thing to do, as opposed to, for instance, a matter of truth or error (e.g., when explaining the correctness of some procedure). Fehr et al. (2015) subsequently theorized that moralized perceptions of a leader's actions originate from followers' moral intuitions, as outlined in moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012). Moral foundations theory postulates that some issues or behaviors are more typically moralized than others. Individuals have intuitive, stock conceptions of care as opposed to harm, fairness as against cheating, loyalty versus betrayal, sanctity set against degradation, authority as compared to subversion, and liberty contrasted with oppression (Fehr et al., 2015; Haidt, 2012) on which they draw when they evaluate issues, and they do so in an immediate and largely intuitive manner (e.g., "It's not right because it doesn't *feel* right"; Haidt, 2001).

Although we acknowledge the fruitfulness of this psychologically grounded perspective on moral leadership for both research and practice, it could at the same time be seen as a rather atomistic, undersocialized account of morality in general and of the moral leadership process in particular. In line with this critique, ethical leadership scholars have recently started to carve out mechanisms through which ethical leadership has its effects—the most significant of which is ethical culture, as a "microcosm" within which followers share similar values (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 2012: 1054). We extend this work by arguing that, when deciding on what is moral in a leader's behavior, individuals rely on socially conditioned and institutionalized ways of seeing things that are available as cultural registers in society and that align with typical evaluation schemas, such as moral universals (e.g., fairness, dignity), family or community values, religious beliefs, or institutional logics (Abend, 2014; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Any moral judgment of issues and leader behavior thus strongly depend on which type of moral system happens to be salient in the individual's mind. To illustrate this point, Leavitt, Reynolds, Barnes, Schilpzand, and Hannah (2012) have shown that dual-occupation individuals with "medical" and "military" orientations dynamically alternated between moral obligations related to these different identities when judging situations, iterating between an ethos of universal care (medical identity) and an ethos of particularistic care (i.e., only caring for an in-group "military" identity). In a similar way, we expect leaders and followers to navigate between different moral systems (see also Verplanken, Trafimow, Khusid, Holland, & Steentjes, 2009), some of which are already part of a given moral system in their organizations, and others being part of alternative moral systems that are available in society and that they pull in to make sense of moral issues (McPherson & Sauder, 2013).

Having identified a number of limitations in prior work that underscore the need for more integrative cross-disciplinary theory, we next define the key foundational concepts upon which we build our process theory and theoretical model.

Morally Charged Leadership in Organizations

Consistent with Donaldson and Dunfee's (1994) theory of social contracts, we consider organizations as localized social orders (at the macro level) through which members of that organization interpret and prioritize among the different moral positions that are available in society and negotiate or drift toward their own "moral free space" (see also Rhodes, 2016). This definition is consistent with research by Gächter and Herrmann (2009) that showed that there can be considerable variation in the norms of cooperation, or moral ethos, between groups and organizations (see also Carnes, Lickel, & Janoff-Bulman, 2015; Leavitt et al., 2012), which in turn suggests that leaders and followers construct their own "social contracts" about what is or is not moral within their organized group (see Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994).

From this perspective, an organization is conceptualized as a community with a characteristic ethos—a moral system—that consists of shared and

binding moral norms (analogous to "contracts") that tie its members together (Ouchi, 1980). As a morally organized communal group, the notion of organization is accordingly not restricted to formal organizations, such as firms or public institutions, but may take on a more sprawling form across an entire industry or an entire field of actors in society (e.g., Weber et al., 2008). The formation of such an organization, as an organized group or movement, is in this sense also an emergent phenomenon, and one that results from repeated interactions between leaders, who initiate a new moral framing of an issue, and others, as "followers," who come to embrace and share the new alternative framing. This view harks back to Selznick (1957), who famously described how the morally charged acts of a leader around issues may influence and shape interaction patterns in such a way that a new set of moral or values-based ideals becomes established and so that follower moralizations become coherently structured as part of a moral "system."

Moral systems and organizations. In order to conceptualize such moral systems, we draw on Haidt (2008: 70), who defined them as "interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible." Haidt (2008) coined this term to start a more interdisciplinary conversation on morality beyond moral psychology, pursuing the question of when individuals in localized social orders (e.g., groups, organizations, professions, families) guide their moral reasoning and collective deliberations on the basis of such a system and beyond their own moral intuitions. Note that the ethical culture construct can also be seen as a moral system according to Haidt's definition, the former being defined as "a subset of organizational culture, representing a multidimensional interplay among various 'formal' and 'informal' systems of behavioral control that are capable of promoting either ethical or unethical behavior" (Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998: 45). However, neither Haidt (2007, 2008, 2012) nor the recent protagonists of the ethical culture construct (e.g., Treviño et al., 1998; Schaubroeck et al., 2012) have elaborated further on how a moral system can be an *emergent* outcome of bottom-up, interactional processes between individuals.

We explicitly take that turn here, supported by evidence in prior research showing that leadership and the interactions it creates is effectively at the core of organizational climates and cultures that drive the moral (or immoral) behavior of organization members (e.g., Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Schaubroeck et al., 2012; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009; Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). From this bottom-up, micro perspective, the moral norms that make up a moral system are first of all constructed and negotiated in interactions between initiative-taking leaders and others as followers in an institutional field (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Further interaction among them may then lead to the confirmation and reinforcement of a broadly shared set of moral norms. When this happens, the proposed norms extend beyond the individual and become part of the communally held moral norms between collectives of actors in an institutional field (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 75). These moral norms involve the set of moral presuppositions that actors, as a result of their ongoing sensemaking and interaction with others, take to be right and true—and believe their partners also take to be proper.

This process of building up a common "moral system" assumes that moral meanings are locally negotiated, and initially around provisional and alternative moral framings of an issue. Over time, however, a dominant moral framing and understanding may propagate among a population of interacting individuals until an entire community within an institutional field shares the same moral code, or system, of thinking and talking about issues (e.g., Gehman et al., 2013). When such a system is established and forms the binding glue between members of an organization, the built-up macro-level conventions at this communal level will intersect with local contexts of interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1974), so that pairs or groups of actors will from then on refer in their interactions to a shared moral system that is salient and recurrent. At this point, a "moral system" is recognizable as "a localized social order with a characteristic set of values."

Defined in this manner, the emergence of moral systems assumes a process of institutionalization, where—over a course of interactions—a moral consensus (or "social contract" in Donaldson & Dunfee's, 1994, terminology) comes to be as native, factual, and natural in the minds of leaders and followers, thus guiding evaluations of themselves and of their organizations, as well as of the actions that they deem morally just (see Creed, DeJordy, & Locke, 2014; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Kraatz, 2009; Wright, Zammuto, & Liesch, 2017). For example, "care and respect for patients" (de Rond & Lok, 2016: 1979) is a

fundamental moral value, or ethos, of the medical profession and guides the energies and emotions of medical professionals toward competent behavior, regardless of the specific circumstances in which they operate (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Wright et al., 2017). While the notion of institutional "ethos" that is discussed within the institutional literature (see also Voronov & Weber, 2016) overlaps to an extent with our conceptualization of moral system, we intentionally apply the term "moral system" in order to signal that we build on, and extend, micro-level theories of morality and leadership (i.e., work by Fehr et al., 2015; Haidt, 2007, 2008, 2012; Schaubroeck et al., 2012) and connect such theorizing to the macro-organizational level of analysis.

Acts of moral framing. To substantiate the bridge between micro-level moral leadership (e.g., follower perceptions and intuitions) and moral systems in organizations, we argue that moral systems originate from social interactions and, in particular, through the way leaders and followers interact and exchange ideas with one another over how issues should be interpreted (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Such social interactions are conditioned by the specific issues a group is facing at a particular moment in time. Within organizations, individuals and groups encounter a range of work- and organization-related issues that are uncertain and equivocal (Sonenshein, 2006, 2016), meaning that they can be "framed" in alternate (e.g., moral values, economic efficiency, or procedural rationality) ways and can form the basis for extensive group deliberation and debate (Sonenshein, 2006). Moral systems can inform this debate by providing moral templates for acts of framing that are perceived as a legitimate or natural way of interpreting the issue. However, when the meaning of issues is equivocal and open for debate (e.g., "Is it our responsibility as an organization to alleviate poverty in the community?"), the boundaries of moral systems may become more flexible and permeable as organizational members tend to draw on values, ideologies, and frames that are imported from broader public discourses within other institutional orders, such as the family, religion, the community, one's profession, the market, the corporation, the state, and so forth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012).

The interactional processes that produce and reproduce a moral system can be conceptualized in different ways and using different theoretical lenses and constructs. We work here with the notion of framing and frame-based interactions (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Goffman, 1974; Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015). Our emphasis on framing is motivated by its theoretical linkages to past micro-level research on moral behavior (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008), its value as a boundary object for cross-level theorizing (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014), and its usefulness to understand influencing skills in leadership processes (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996).

We define "framing" as an act of communication, initiated by leaders (or by followers in reaction to leaders), which foregrounds certain preferred interpretations while at the same time backgrounding others. For instance, an issue can be "framed" in a communicated message as, for example, a matter of care or harm, fairness or cheating, loyalty or betrayal, liberty or oppression, or as an economic, legal, or technical matter. While it is possible for issues to be completely and exhaustively framed through the selection of a distinct moral frame (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008), in practice, leaders may as part of their framing include moral elements (such as fairness and righteousness) alongside frames coming from other moral systems (around, say, legal or economic elements) (Goffman, 1974; Gray et al., 2015; Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014). Furthermore, framing is a socially situated process wherein the resulting frame-based interactions have an emergent and dynamic character; such interactions and the moral norms they give rise to are not a product of design or a direct outcome of the actions of an individual leader. Individuals may, as we will elaborate below, resist a particular moral framing of a leader or argue for alternative framings, effectively then undermining the establishment of a new moral system.

Politics around moral systems. A further crucial assumption is that moral systems are inherently contested and pliable. Moral systems are subject to revision and negotiation, with alternative values and ideologies being entertained and with alternative moral framings continuously vying for prominence (e.g., Kaplan, 2008; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). In this sense, frame-based interactions are analogous to a political turf game (Buchanan & Badham, 2008) with emergent leaders and followers positioned as politically motivated, embedded agents who actively seek to maintain or disrupt the moral systems they inhabit (see Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Lok, 2010; Thornton et al., 2012). Moral systems change when leaders manage to mobilize followers to resist the present moral order and consensus in favor of an alternative. Besides such plasticity, moral systems are also plural in nature, meaning that leaders and followers may, as members of an organization and as

members of society, at the same time inhabit *multiple* moral systems (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Leavitt et al., 2012; Lok, 2010; Thornton et al., 2012; Verplanken et al., 2009).

In summary, moral systems are negotiated orders wherein leaders and followers actively engage through framing in "moral boundary work" by segmenting or integrating ideals and values that belong to the various moral systems in which they participate (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). They may seek to broaden the moral system to subsume other values and ideals, thereby actively reshaping, dismantling, or stretching moral system boundaries (see Ashforth et al., 2000; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), resulting in a process of emergent moral leadership. And, once the moral system has been revised, leaders and followers may seek to maintain and protect moral system boundaries (see Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Wright et al., 2017) in order sustain the new moral order in their organization.

In what follows, we will first elaborate the emergence of moral leadership and then discuss in more detail how leadership and political processes contribute to the emergence and maintenance of moral systems within organizations. In doing so, we limit our scope to the emergence, development, and maintenance of moral systems *within* organizations and will thus only discuss societal-level moral systems insofar as they are drawn in by leaders or followers and impact moral matters within organizations.

THE EMERGENCE OF MORAL LEADERSHIP

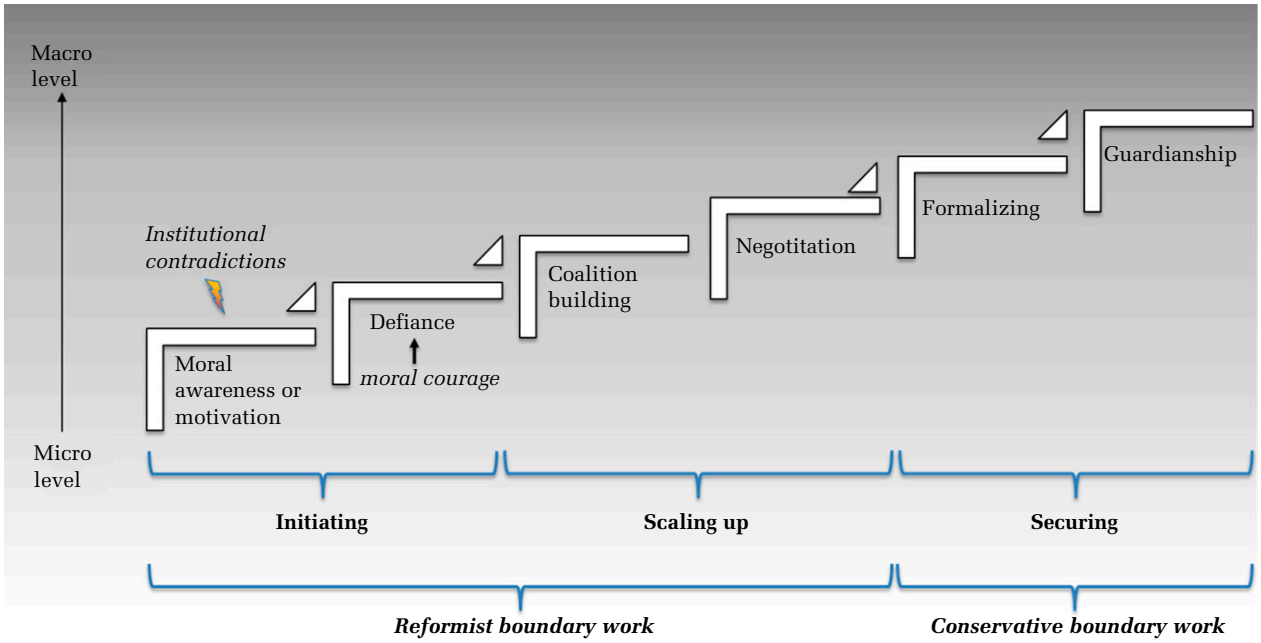
Emergent moral leaders essentially defy an existing moral order and spur change in moral systems over time. When thinking about moral leaders that have spearheaded transformations of moral systems, we often think of top-level executives like Ray Anderson (Interface) or Peter Löscher (Siemens). Less obvious, but no less important, are cases in which moral systems are transformed from the bottom up following episodes of emergent moral leadership by low- or mid-level-ranked employees. A well-known example is how Elizabeth Whalen took a moral stance, while an intern at Columbia Forest Products, on the issue of toxic formaldehyde in plywood glues. Defying heavy resistance from organizational incumbents, she succeeded in transforming the organizational moral system into a more community-sensitive one, and, in doing so, changed her entire industry toward more responsible and sustainable practices (Pinchot, 2017). Likewise, Darcy Winslow at Nike moralized the lack of diversity and what she saw as male parochialism in sports shoe design, and, based on her success in campaigning for a change in the industry, now leads Nike's most profitable shoe-making branch targeted at especially women (Pinchot, 2017). And Tariq Yusuf, a Google employee, took a moralized stance against issues of internal harassment at Google; his grassroots leadership built up a strong following internally within Google and helped start a broader movement around changing the culture of Silicon Valley (Guynn, 2018).

Within the management literature, current conceptualizations of ethical leadership place a strong emphasis on the maintenance of the moral order (Brown et al., 2005; Lemoine et al., 2019: Treviño et al., 2000). However, what these examples of exemplary moral leaders have in common is *not* how they maintained a particular moral order, but how they *defied* a moral regime by taking an alternative, morally charged stance toward an issue and mobilized others to do the same. These examples are prototypical for what we regard as "emergent moral leadership." Such leadership is informal and emergent, such that an individual's voice around an issue takes root and subsequently becomes the voice of a moral *leader*. This double interact is consistent with interactive leadership theory, which suggests that leadership is an emergent phenomenon resulting from a group member's claim to a particular kind of leadership and other group members then endorsing this type of leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). We argue that an episode of moral leadership emergence subsequently comes to a conclusion when the leader's proposed moral framing gains common ground in the organization and becomes established and—possibly, in time—institutionalized (see Green, 2004; Hoefer & Green, 2016).

This view of emergent moral leadership as a form of "*reformist* boundary work" around existing moral systems is consistent with Burns's (1978: 427, 434) seminal theory of "transforming" leadership, according to which the "test of the leadership function is their contribution to change, measured by purpose drawn from collective motives and values . . . the achievement of real change in the direction of 'higher' values."

In what follows, we theorize about six critical steps in the emergent moral leadership process, starting at the informal, micro level and gradually becoming more formalized at the macro, organizational level (see Figure 1). The process starts with the "initiation" of a moral reframing of issues via "moral awareness"

FIGURE 1
Successive Steps in How Emergent Moral Leaders Spur Change in Moral Systems



and the "moral courage" of a leader to speak up. The leader then becomes a focal point of influence as they attempt to "scale up" a moral reframing of issues by "building a coalition" and "negotiating" a moral understanding with others, such that leaders' and followers' individual frames amplify into a common footing for followers in the organization. In the final phase, the focus of the moral leader and their followers shifts, as already mentioned, toward protecting the boundaries of the revised moral system via "formalization" and "guardianship" so that this new moral order, or "character" (Selznick, 1957), can be maintained. Taken together, "emergent moral leadership" can be defined "a process where a person becomes a focal point of influence in initiating, scaling up, and securing a moral reframing of issues."

The Initiation of Moral Leadership: Moral Awareness and Moral Courage

From moral awareness to moral motivation. Not all issues are experienced morally, as the individuals perceiving them are not always morally aware (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Any episode of emergent moral leadership must first start with an awareness of a particular moral discrepancy or grievance, triggered by an issue at hand. For instance, an institutionalized practice at Nike to not sufficiently cater to women's needs in sports shoe design (purportedly known as "shrink them and pink them") came to be perceived by Darcy Winslow as a *moral* issue; namely, as a form of male parochialism and as reflecting a dearth of diversity in the industry's moral system. This moral awareness, in turn, stirred Winslow's moral motivation to try and change the status quo.

To outline the steps that lead to awareness and motivation, we argue that moral awareness is first and foremost embedded within existing, systemic tensions, known as "institutional contradictions" (Seo & Creed, 2002; Wright et al., 2017). These contradictions provide the raw material, or meaning structure, for subsequent moralizations and thus the seedbed for the emergence of moral leadership. Such perceived contradictions may be readily present within organizations when interest groups in the organization have different and conflicting allegiances to alternative moral systems, such as professional versus corporate systems in hospitals (Wright et al., 2017), professional versus market systems in accounting firms (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), and market versus community systems within governmental agencies (Tilcsik, 2010), universities (Kraatz et al., 2010), social enterprises (Ramus, Vaccaro, & Brusoni, 2017), and in the investment

banking industry (Morrison & Wilhelm, 2008). In other instances, the individual experiences a contradiction between the local moral system and "moral universals," the latter being a society's more or less universally accepted notions of equality, fairness, dignity, honesty, do-no-harm, and human rights (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Taylor, 1989). Darcy Winslow's apprehension of male parochialism in sports shoe design, for instance, resulted from a contradiction between Nike's shoe design practices and broader notions of a woman's independence, dignity, and the value of diversity. Alternatively, tensions may arise from schisms within the moral self, and thus from within the individual, such as being a church leader and gay (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010), scientist and feminist (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007), or a member of both the Peace Corps and IBM (Davis & White, 2015).

Yet, as is evident from the examples listed above, for these perceived tensions to trigger a strong moral awareness and the motivation to change the status quo, they have to be more than simple observations and cannot remain abstract ponderings. Instead, the tensions described above must be perceived as *personal* moral violations to the individual to autonomously trigger strongly felt moral emotions (Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). In other words, "emotions arise in response to events that are important to the individual's goals, motives, or concerns" (Frijda, 1988: 351), such as strongly identifying with an issue personally or with the suffering it causes to others. Male parochialism at Nike's sport shoe design felt personal to Darcy Winslow because she herself is a woman. Thus, an issue triggers an awareness of an existing institutional contradiction, which, when felt as personal to the individual, sets off a set of moral emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, pride, anger, indignation, disgust). These emotions in turn impel the individual to reify the issue as morally "wrong" and reprehensible (Fehr et al., 2015; Haidt, 2001; Weaver et al., 2014), and as something that has to be acted upon and addressed.

An action tendency to change the status quo—thus, a "moral motivation"—follows naturally from the experience of deeply felt, and thus personal, moral emotions (Frijda, 1986, 1988; Haidt, 2012). As such, individuals become motivated to change the status quo in order to resolve an uncomfortable tension within themselves (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002; Gutierrez et al., 2010; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Voronov & Yorks, 2015). This particular role of a personally experienced conflict in the emergence of moral leadership is in fact consistent with the following broader observation made by Burns (1978: 38–39): "Leadership is . . . grounded in a seedbed of conflict. Conflict is intrinsically compelling; it galvanizes, prods, motivates people ... Leaders do not shun conflict; they confront it, exploit it, and ultimately embody it." Thus:

> *Proposition 1. The degree to which individuals are motivated to defy a moral regime—and potentially evolve into a moral leader—is dependent on the emotional intensity with which they experience the existing framing of issues as conflicting with their own investments in alternative moral systems.*

The buildup toward moral courage. A moral motivation impels leaders and followers to want to defy a moral regime, even in the face of risk. Persistence in the face of risk asks for a particular kind of action tendency, which we know as moral courage (see also Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Hannah, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2011). "Moral courage" can be defined as an action tendency that impels an individual to act ethically, even in the face of opposition, fear, or personal risk. While some individuals are generally more courageous than others, the notion of moral courage as an action tendency (following Frijda, 1988) means that it is a psychological *state* that can vary both between persons and *within* persons over time. The latter implies that there can just as well be episodes of moral courage as well as episodes revealing a lack of courage within the same individual. It also implies that moral courage can build up over time following (a combination of) triggers in an individual's environment.

At first, a person's moral courage to defy a moral regime will, as suggested above, stem from having a personal stake in, and emotional involvement with, an issue. As an individual becomes increasingly involved with the issue, personal involvement becomes entangled with a sense of duty and responsibility for easing the suffering of *others* (Levinas, 1972). For instance, Elizabeth Whalen felt she could not stand idly by while others were dying (Pinchot, 2017). Research shows that individuals are more likely to escalate on their commitments on altruistic initiatives (concerning the welfare of others) than on self-serving initiatives (Schaumberg & Wiltermuth, 2014). Indeed, personal suffering can often be withstood, but the suffering of *others* introduces an extra factor—namely, the potential of guilt after inaction. Research shows that individuals are prepared to make huge sacrifices to preserve their moral self-regard and to free themselves of guilt (Bastian, Jetten, & Fasoli,

2011; Cormack, 2002; Inbar, Pizarro, Gilovich, & Ariely, 2013). Additionally, taking responsibility for and facing personal risks for the sake of others is likely to boost one's positive self-image, as it is universally seen as one of the noblest things we can do as human beings (Cormack, 2002; Oliner, 2003).

When building up moral courage, a moral motivation and a sense of duty to act for the sake of others are unlikely to remain purely individual matters. Rather, we expect that these will amplify in response to experiences of resonance with others in the organization, as followers. This is consistent with a broader notion, argued for by Burns (1978), that leaders and followers raise *each other* to higher levels of moral functioning. In early stages, interactions with others as potential followers may provide resonance and support for raising the moral awareness of the issue and for the alternative framing, which then reinforces the resolve of the individual to change the status quo. In a later stage, as leader and follower roles have become established, moral courage on the part of followers is similarly required as they are likely to face the same moral policing from conservative "guardians." Indeed, historical accounts clearly detail that the first ring of followers faced similar risks as the initial system-defying leader (e.g., physical danger; Chaleff, 2009; Oliner, 2003).

Thus, experiencing resonance with followers in the defiance of a moral regime, even to the point of collectively facing risk and peril, will strengthen the resolve of an emergent moral leader to continue on a courageous line action. With others facing risk, and with the leader directly sharing this experience with them, they are compelled to carry on. The emergent leader may in fact escalate in their commitment to action and may not see a way back, in the sense that the leader cannot let others down and now also acts directly on the follower's behalf. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Proposition 2. An individual's moral courage to defy a moral regime builds up as their personal involvement with an issue becomes entangled with a sense of duty for the sake of others.

Moral courage is a crucial enabler in the process of moral leadership emergence. It is needed because an alternative, moral framing of any issue may invite moral policing by incumbent organizational members who are emotionally invested into maintaining the status quo and who may as such be likely to resist or rebuff alternatives (Creed et al., 2014; Haidt, 2007; Wright et al., 2017). Without courage, an individual may be aware of a grievance, and even feel personally touched by the issue, but they will lack the fortitude to publicly voice an alternative. Harking back to the political nature of moral systems as a struggle between reformists and conservatives, an alternative voice must scale up and gain a robust followership in order to stand a chance against acts of *conservative* boundary work from the incumbent moral system "guardians." Recall also our notion of emergent moral leadership as a process of becoming a focal point of influence in initiating, scaling up, and securing a moral reframing of issues; in accordance with this definition, moral leadership fails to materialize without courage. For instance, Elizabeth Whalen at Columbia Forest Products (Pinchot, 2017)—the intern who moralized the issue of toxic formaldehyde in plywood glues—faced fierce opposition from powerful incumbents at her manufacturing department; they even mobilized the industry press against her. Being only an intern (as well as pregnant at the time), there was strong pressure to leave the issue to rest. Without the moral courage to speak up, Whalen would have felt forced to refrain from action, thus terminating the moral leadership process. Yet, she stayed involved with the issue and had the courage to act, even despite the apparent opposition and potential risks to her position and career. Her moral courage was therefore an important enabler (or "moderator," in more analytical terms) of her emergence as a moral leader.

Proposition 3. The degree to which an emergent moral leader is compelled to stand up and offer an alternative moral framing of an issue is moderated by their moral courage, such that, with higher levels of courage, they are compelled to act on an issue, whereas a lower level of courage may lead to continued inaction on the issue.

Moral Leadership Scaling Up: From Individual to Collective Action Frames

From an institutional perspective, emergent moral leadership can be viewed as reform-oriented institutional work (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009) around moral systems, but with a more interactional focus on how frame-based interactions between leaders and followers initiate a change to or reform of existing *moral systems*. Work on framing within the social movement and leadership domains has demonstrated the importance of leadership tactics whereby emergent leaders are able to offer compelling frame-based visions that motivate followers into action (e.g., Antonakis, Bastardoz, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016; Benford & Snow, 2000; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). An important

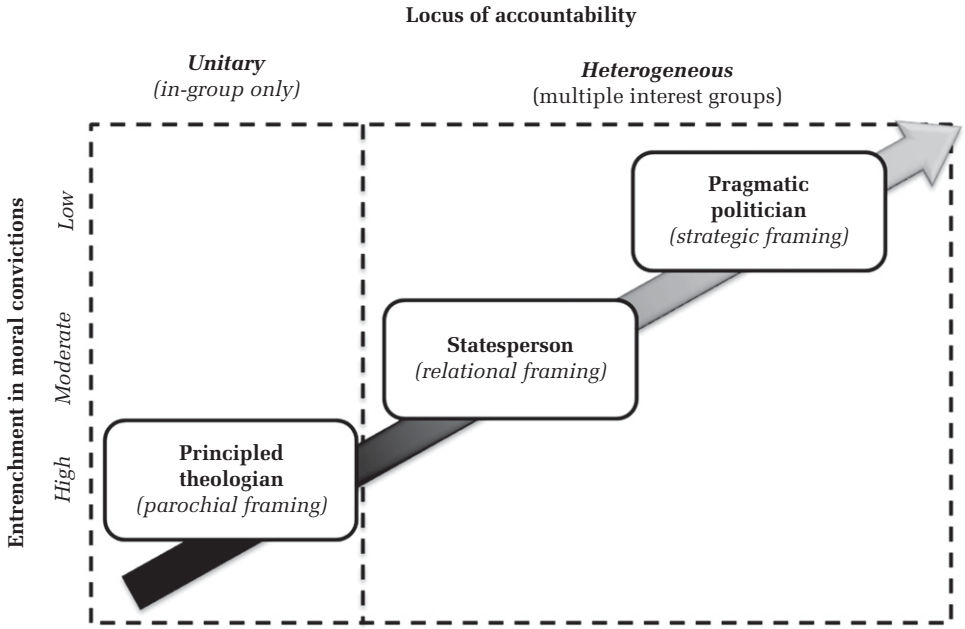
insight arising from this body of work as a whole is that, in order to mobilize a broad base of followers into a reform-oriented movement, leaders use specific framing-based tactics such as transforming or rekeying existing moral frames so that these accommodate alternative framings of issues and bring alternative viewpoints together as part of commonly defined "collective action frames." An example is Kevin Thompson's initiative of developing a community initiative within IBM and instilling a community logic within the broader technology industry, analogous to the Peace Corps (Davis & White, 2015). Thompson cleverly construed the initiative as incorporating and blending moral universals for reaching out to the poor (which includes frames of inclusion or exclusion, care, fairness, dignity), a professional logic (offering a trainee program for IBM entrants), a market logic (forming a client base in emerging markets), and a corporate logic (retaining staff). As a result of this creative blend, preexisting meanings were transformed and combined as part of an attractive overall framing and to such an extent that the perception of a win–win situation was created (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gray et al., 2015; Hahn et al., 2014). The result of such a process is a compelling "collective action frame" that not only resonates with but also actually integrates the beliefs and values of multiple followers.

In comparison, emergent moral leadership fails to materialize when a collective action frame is not established and supported by followers; that is, when organizational members, as potential followers, hold onto their own moral frames (Lakoff, 2016) and actively retort with framings of their own when interpreting the moral intentions of a leader (e.g., Fehr et al., 2015; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). In other words, moral leaders need to successfully bridge between their own moral convictions and those of others, either by appealing to resonant overarching moral principles and emotions, or, in other instances, by gradually convincing followers of the appropriateness of their moral framing. The degree to which leaders succeed in bridging between personal and others' framings of issues depends on their communicative and persuasive skills, but also on how leadership manifests itself in social interactions. Below, we suggest three ideal-typical approaches to how leaders approach such relationship building (see also Figure 2), as (1) the principled theologian, (2) the pragmatic politician, and (3) the statesperson. While these figurative images are of course theoretical idealizations, we suggest that they are predictive of whether leaders can successfully engage with the moral viewpoints of others, and whether, based on such engagement, they are able to establish a settlement, or new moral "contract" (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994), that can bring about a durable change in the moral system within the organization.

"Principled theologians." The "principled theologian" is a puritan moral leader who has a strong attachment to their own moral convictions because of high degrees of internalization and identification with the values and issue concerned (i.e., high self-centrality [Aquino & Reed, 2002; Verplanken & Holland, 2002]). They typically have a high need for cognitive closure (i.e., high desire for definitive knowledge on some issue), which comes with emotionally charged (Haidt, 2001) and cognitively entrenched positions regarding an issue (Dane, 2010; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Lakoff, 2016). The principled theologian treats values as sacred and beyond compromise (Tetlock, 2002) while placing strong taboos on the blending or assimilation of their view of issues with other potential interpretations (e.g., administrative, strategic, economic, technical; Lakoff, 2016; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). In fact, there is experimental research showing that principled theologians are motivated to prevent moral "failure," which they imagine to happen if their moral causes are thwarted or diluted by secular encroachments (Tetlock et al., 2000). Yet, other experimental research shows that threats of moral failure invite increased resistance, persistence, and behavioral rigidity in these kinds of principled moral leaders (Bélanger, Lafreniere, Vallerand, & Kruglanski, 2013).

To illustrate, consider, as a fictional example, a tenured academic in a business school trying to convince his colleagues in the business and management community of the need for recasting research and teaching in terms of their impact on society. When operating as a principled theologian, the academic will engage in a strictly *parochial* framing as a dominant strategy toward relationship building; forwarding an exclusive, one-sided moral interpretation of an issue that chimes with their own personal convictions and their interest group (Lakoff, 2016). For instance, they may contrast the closed-off nature of academic research with the need for academics to become community servants and be practically relevant. Insofar as this principled framing then resonates with such an in-group (e.g., academic faculty already involved with business and societal engagements), the principled theologian may garner success, with followers attributing extraordinary moral qualities to the leader, enabled and reinforced by their own already held moral beliefs and into which they

FIGURE 2
Leader Ideal-Types in the Scaling Up of Moral Leadership



have been culturally socialized (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Lakoff, 2016). However, when the context is characterized by a diversity of individuals and groups having different moral beliefs, the staunch commitment of the "principled theologian" will backfire. For example, the academic in our case example may encounter fierce opposition from tenured professors in the community who have a more fundamental research orientation, as well as from those (e.g., faculty on tenure-track contracts) who are dependent on such an orientation to manage their careers. Unable to adjust their moral framing to entertain, let alone accommodate, alternative viewpoints, the principled theologian will then in turn be seen as a forlorn figure. Thus:

> *Proposition 4. When moral leaders staunchly commit themselves to a singular and self-referential framing of an issue, they are not likely to build a strong enough following to change the moral system in their organization.*

"Pragmatic politicians." The "pragmatic politician" is comparatively less personally invested in a moral framing of an issue; the pragmatist tends to have a low need for cognitive closure and possesses a calculative stance toward the social issue involved. They have a great deal of cognitive flexibility and do not need to settle for one specific interpretation of an issue (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Dane, 2010; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The pragmatist tends to be aware of the various moral views and framings held by others, including other interest groups, and will engage in *strategic* framing to bridge between, and skillfully address, the views of others (e.g., Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996; Cornelissen, 2012; Werner & Cornelissen, 2014). In practice, this often means that the moral leader will render the social issue in a way that is consistent with dominant or already familiar frames of others (Sonenshein, 2006; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). For instance, investments in staff may be framed pragmatically as a means to gain competitive advantage to ultimately drive profits; non-discrimination policies may be framed as a means to prevent legal actions and ultimately save costs; and implementing ethical guidelines may be framed as a way to comply with exogenous institutional rules and regulations.

Insofar as this kind of moral leader is effectively able to frame the issue in the already existing terms of the moral system, the pragmatic politician is, similar to the principled theologian, brittle in their likelihood to be successful—the difference then being their motives and the starting point of their framing efforts (i.e., others or themselves). Through framing tactics and adjustments (i.e., keying, rekeying, and laminations; see Gray et al., 2015), moral leaders of this kind may however skillfully accommodate parts of alternative framings into their own frame, or

present more abstract frames that span the frames of structurally disconnected individuals and groups in the community (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). Consider, for example, again the academic introduced above, who, now acting as a pragmatic politician, invents the inclusive catchphrase "business scholarship for society." With this phrase, he may be able to appeal to a broad coalition of academics with varied backgrounds and orientations. In a subsequent attempt to enroll further faculty into this collective frame, including those that would likely be resistant, he may add an additional lamination to the frame (e.g., fundamental research also contributes to society in the long run, and publication outputs contribute to visibility of the business school), in order to enable a settlement around this newly shared moral framing.

At the same time, however, the tactical way in which frames are then connected may also lead to the construction of "compromise frames" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), a "patchwork" of prior frames, or an overarching frame that designates "something for everyone" (Rao & Kenney, 2008) and that only loosely connects various moral ways of thinking about an issue, may only partially address the moral viewpoints of followers, and is oftentimes hard to translate into actual policy. As a consequence, the proposed moral framing may be seen as representing a fragile moral truce or settlement (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). If such a brittle settlement (Rao & Kenney, 2008) is then formalized without a thorough integration of viewpoints and values-based commitments on the part of followers, it runs the risk of becoming a form of "window dressing"—for example, when the "business scholarship for society" catchphrase comes to be only used to appease accreditation bodies and practice-based stakeholders. In such instances, the moral framing may be loosely coupled to followers' ongoing daily practices regarding the issue (Ramus et al., 2017; Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999), and, as such, the proposed framing will not fundamentally lead to a significant breakaway from followers' existing modes of thinking and behaving. The net result is a perceived lack of behavioral integrity and moral consistency in the eyes of followers, which is then detrimental to the leader's moral authority and continued success in sustaining momentum around a moral framing (Simons, 2002).

Proposition 5. When moral leaders pragmatically combine the views of different followers in their framing of an issue, they may secure some initial common ground for the proposed change but run the risk that, in time, the framing is seen as superficial and as not sufficiently moral to warrant continued follower support.

The "statesperson."[1] Compared to the "pragmatic politician," moral leaders in the image of the "statesman" (Selznick, 1957) similarly recognize the need to balance between moral views and to accommodate the views of others, yet the type of framing and reframing that they engage in is not strategic but *relational* in nature, which means that the statesperson actively tries to rekey and blend frames into a coherent common ground (Cornelissen, 2012; Maak et al., 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). In such a relational approach to framing, a statesperson may laminate one framing over the other (Gray et al., 2015; Hahn et al., 2014), or rekey moral elements (such as principles or outcomes) of frames, all the while ensuring that the grounds of combining frames remains recognizably moral and values-based in nature (e.g., no longer accepting of ivory-tower, quantity-focused publication practices in the example of the business school above). They may do this, for example, by appealing to an overarching moral principle or moral universal, or by demonstrating that trade-offs should reinforce a moral conviction (e.g., about the fundamental place of a university in society) and should not be supplanted with more short-term goal displacements (e.g., immediate rewards gained by fast, low-impact publication strategies).

The above-presented academic, acting as a statesperson, will yet also stay in dialogue with opposing groups, look for *win–wins*, or provide catered solutions (e.g., luring alternative incentives) to those with opposing interests. Anchoring a diverse set of viewpoints in a recognizably moral vision and tractable practices gives the statesperson credibility in the eyes of heterogeneous followers and the mandate to forge collaborative connections between disparate groups. Because of their moral courage, their continued grounding of actions and communications in a moral conviction, and their demonstrated care for others, a statesperson is as a moral leader also seen as more authentic and virtuous, instilling further trust in followers (Lemoine et al., 2019; Maak et al., 2016; Meyerson, 2008; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). The upshot of this approach is that, in comparison to the pragmatic politician, the statesperson may be able to create more lasting and "integrated" moral settlements (Rao & Kenney, 2008), as opposed to a "patchwork" compromise solution that only partially satisfies the moral concerns of followers (as in the mentioned example of Kevin Thompson's integrative

[1] We have changed Selznick's (1957) original term "statesman" into "statesperson" in order to signal that this concept refers to both men and women.

settlement within IBM and the technology industry creating win–wins for all parties involved). When emergent moral leaders subsequently manage to broker moral expectations in this manner, they achieve common ground around a proposed moral framing, which may then, when shared, become the "collective action frame" of an organized group (Benford & Snow, 2000). As followers recognize themselves in the frame, and agree with the solution that it offers, they in turn are likely to go out of their way to spread the new moral framing within the organization. In this way, followership across the organization continues to broaden out, and provides the base for a new moral settlement that changes the existing moral system (Gehman et al., 2013). Accordingly:

Proposition 6. When moral leaders, in their framing, mediate between their own convictions and the moral views of others on the basis of substantive, moral grounds, they are more likely to create a new moral settlement that warrants continued follower support.

Securing the Change: Formalizing a New Moral Framing

Symbolic leadership practices. To achieve such a widespread diffusion of a new framing requires, we argue, a number of leadership processes targeted at maintaining momentum and at institutionalizing the moral framing, securing the change of the moral system from within. First, emergent moral leaders need to continue to articulate, embody, and symbolize the values that are shared as part of the new moral framing to foster active and continued followership. Their role is to actively weave an invisible "moral fabric" (Brooks, 2017; Maak & Pless, 2006) that followers can recognize, relate to, and subsequently refer to in their own experiences and behaviors and in interactions with others. For example, leaders may create and sustain myths that speak about the origin and meaning of the system's moral underpinnings (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). They furthermore "walk the talk" in line with the proposed framing (Brown et al., 2005; Lemoine et al., 2019; Simons, 2002) and they are visible during staged events and ritualized practices that have a performative and educational function (e.g., meetings, study groups, rallies, discussion fora). Moral leaders may furthermore strengthen follower identification with the proposed frame-based values by creating resonance with broader societal discourses connected with alternative social orders (e.g., religion, family, environmental, or civic value frameworks) or by contrasting the moral frame with other framings or logics (e.g., anti-consumerism, anti-corporate, etc.; see Weber et al., 2008). Through this role and by continuing to articulate the consensus values of the group, the moral leader becomes a surrogate target for followers' identification, as a proximal representation of the moral values that are at stake (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Shils, 1965). In other words, followers may form attachments to a proposed moral framing *via* their interactions with leaders.

Moral management. Such symbolic management, while necessary, at the same time signifies the precarious nature of informal leaders trying to establish a new moral regime. Support for a frame may waver unless emergent leaders manage to win over a large enough following, and, in doing so, either directly or indirectly influence crucial opinion leaders or powerful others (e.g., senior managers, industry representatives) to change practices, behaviors, and formal policies in the organization in line with the new moral frame. Unless such a formalization happens, the proposed framing is at risk of returning to its incipient state of simply being seen as an alternative possible framing of an issue and alongside other possible framings as part of the previous moral system or yet other imagined alternatives (Ramus et al., 2017). To spearhead such formalization, moral leaders themselves also need to change tack toward leadership practices that have bureaucratic overtones (Burns, 1978; Lemoine et al., 2019; Treviño et al., 2000).

From early leadership theory (e.g., Weber, 1947/1978), we learn that charismatic (or transformational) leadership eventually becomes traditionalized or rationalized, which also implies a transitioning from emergent and informal to more procedural and formalized forms of moral leadership (see also DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The consequence of a switch to a more formalized form of moral leadership comes with a focus on "moral management," whereby the leader, together with followers in the organization, works on formalizing and installing new compliance structures and incentive schemes (Smith-Crowe, Tenbrunsel, Chan-Serafin, Brief, & Umphress, 2015) and continues to specify the importance and implications of the new moral system (in terms of scorecards, behavioral guidelines, etc.). The consequence of such formalization is that the new moral framing is externalized as a "given" set of moral norms that are embedded in practices, incentive structures, and general policies and guidelines within the organization. We argue that, unless such formalization in official structures, policies, and guidelines takes place, the

new moral framing, while collectively shared, risks remaining a secondary concern when organizational members are making operational decisions (Ramus et al., 2017; Selznick, 1957). Without formalization, the moral settlement that was established may become more brittle, with the potential of waning follower support. Without formalization, it will also be harder to sustain the same levels of moral awareness and involvement with the issue among followers, who, in time, may resort to alternative framings or may lose interest in the issue altogether. Hence:

Proposition 7. The degree to which moral leaders are able to secure broad-based and continued support for their moral framing depends on the degree to which they are able, alone or with others, to formalize the moral framing into organizational structures, policies, and guidelines.

Guardianship over the Changed Moral System

Up to this point, we have defined emergent moral leadership as a process whereby a person becomes a focal point of influence in initiating, scaling up, and securing a moral reframing of issues. This definition implies a form of reform-oriented institutional work around moral systems that revolves around redefining what is considered as moral within the context of organizational issues. When a novel moral framing has taken hold and has become institutionalized, moral leadership transitions into a maintenance function, whereby the moral leader comes to act as a *guardian* to uphold the boundaries around a moral system (Maak & Pless, 2006; O'Gorman, Henrich, & Van Vugt, 2008; Selznick, 1957). In doing so, they aim to secure the integrity of the newly established moral system and may thereby assure a group's stable moral identity, climate, and infrastructure (Schaubroeck et al., 2012; Smith-Crowe et al., 2015). Such a role is needed, as the institutionalization of a new frame into practices and policies does not negate the need for ongoing leadership. The settlement around a frame remains a precarious arrangement that needs safeguarding by moral leaders to protect it from outside challenges. Therefore, episodic or intermittent acts of moral leadership continue to be required to *protect* the boundaries of the moral system over time. The need for moral leadership becomes especially conspicuous when the system's consensus values are challenged, and when the (present or future) integrity of the system is insecure or at stake. In those moments, moral leaders have to step up as *beacons* of recognition, such that followers continue to be reassured of their own shared values and of the moral system that is in place.

Such moral guardianship around the established moral system can be defined as a process wherein a leader within a local social order becomes a focal point of influence (a "beacon of recognition") in maintaining and developing a characteristic set of values. This definition contains both maintenance and development as key elements within the work that moral leaders do to protect and maintain a newly established moral system. In terms of development, moral leaders support the willing participation in moral systems by others and enable them to develop and elaborate their own subjective experiences and behaviors as part of the moral system. Without fostering such development of followers as autonomous thinkers with voluntary attachments to institutional arrangements, moral systems may otherwise evolve to become repressive systems that are marked by an authoritarian leadership structure. In other words, moral systems are not impersonal vehicles for subjugation, propaganda, or control. When they are enacted, they are experienced as highly personal by followers; as objects of personal attachment and commitment (Voronov & Weber, 2016) and as vehicles for the development of their own moral self, or "character" (Selznick, 1957).

Besides developmental work toward the maintenance of a moral system, moral leaders also engage simultaneously in activities aimed at controlling and protecting the core values at the heart of the moral system. Without a degree of control to maintain the moral system that has been put in place, moral systems may otherwise erode such that followers may start behaving according to other motives, including self-interested motives (Selznick, 1957; Treviño et al., 1998). Moral systems may then drift away from their values-based underpinnings and start incorporating "exogenous" frames from, for example, alternative corporate, market, or legal orders (Kraatz et al., 2010; Rhodes, 2016; Selznick, 1957).

The statesperson as a guardian. The moral leader thus actively has to balance between processes of development and maintenance or control while engaging in conservative boundary work practices. Too much emphasis on control resembles a "principled theologian" (entrenched in moral content while forgetting the relational aspect), while too much emphasis on development seems to resemble the "pragmatic politician" (i.e., too easily swayed along with current developments and insufficiently "grounded" in a moral conviction). This balance between the two also resembles a paradox between reforming yet

simultaneously conserving the moral system that has been established in interactions with followers (Ansell, Boin, & Farjoun, 2015; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998). Selznick (1957) referred to this balancing act as the continuous development of the "character" of the organization, which involves leaders and followers updating and adjusting the moral course of the organization, yet in ways that are anchored in past commitments and a collectively established set of convictions—that is, a shared moral system.

In line with our earlier arguments, we argue that the stewardship of this character development process requires moral leaders who act as "statesmen" (Selznick, 1957). In this role, the moral leader recognizes the value of engaging with others in a fair and transparent manner, and will, where necessary, make adjustments or allow for compromises in daily practices and routines, but in ways that still conform to the previously established moral system. This degree of recognizing fairness and deliberation in ongoing conservative boundary practices—as opposed to a leader being too parochial (the "principled theologian") or too superficial (the "pragmatic politician")—will have as an effect on followers that the protection of the moral system is more likely to become actively shared as a common concern and set of convictions—in short, a common "organizational character" (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). The criterion for effective moral guardianship is thus not only whether a moral leader is able to control and maintain the boundaries of a moral system for a short period of time, but also whether followers, after interactions with the leader, would *willingly* maintain the boundaries of the moral system *themselves.* This self-perpetuating aspect is a key characteristic of institutionalized moral systems (Jepperson, 1991) and rooted in leader–follower interactions. In other words, if the initial institutionalizing work of individual moral leaders around newly established moral systems is initially effective, it is likely to lead to ongoing institutional maintenance work that is shared between members of the organization. The individual moral leader may then continue to act as a "beacon" of the shared moral values, but, equally, others may come to perform similar roles and through their own actions will continue to affirm the boundaries of the moral system. Put formally:

Proposition 8. The institutionalization of a new moral framing into a moral system is associated with the degree to which followers start to actively protect the boundaries of the newly established moral system.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

In the present paper, we have emphasized the embedded agency of moral leadership by elucidating how leaders and followers, through frame-based interactions, (re-)produce "moral systems," defined as localized social orders with a characteristic set of values. Local settings may stir up an emergent moral leadership process that might produce dynamic shifts within moral systems in organizations. In particular, moral systems transform as emergent moral leaders resist the localized order, initiate an alternative, moral framing of issues, and influence followers to do the same, such that the new moral frames become shared. After new moral frames have suffused the organization to make for a revised moral order, there is a temporal shift from the initial disruption to the *maintenance* of the moral system, whereby a leader becomes a focal point of influence (a beacon of recognition) in maintaining the integrity of a newly established moral system.

Moral leadership, organizations, and institutions. Through our positioning of moral leadership at the crossroads of micro and macro levels of analysis, we aim to build bridges between theories concerning micro-level leadership research and macro-level accounts of localized interaction orders (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994) and of the institutionalization of a moral ethos, or character (Selznick, 1957; Gehman et al., 2013). Doing so offers new pathways for research that could examine "institutional" ingredients as the very source of moral endeavors (via institutional contradictions within the self and the workplace), including the rules by which moral leaders play and how they connect with others who tend to frame and see issues differently. We have developed the argument that leaders are successful to the extent that they can skillfully mediate between the values and beliefs of others and leverage their emotional investments. In addition, moral systems are established interaction orders that, in turn, operate as cultural registers in leaders' and followers' minds (Voronov & Yorks, 2015) and thus influence the kinds of institutional contradictions one might be expected to witness, including the alternative moralizations individuals are likely to come up with and feel courageous enough about to pursue. This institutionally embedded leadership perspective is much more situated and processual in orientation than conventional leadership approaches that tend to be person-centric and emphasize formal "styles" of leadership (e.g., Lemoine et al., 2019; Maak et al., 2016). Thus, pursuing this line of inquiry opens up

new questions and candidate inferences compared to the traditional person-based emphasis on leadership emergence, which is restricted to a focus on *who* is likely to stand up as a moral leader (Dinh et al., 2014; Foti & Hauenstein, 2007; Mayer et al., 2009).

In addition, we also believe that our theorizing has implications for macro-level research on the organization-wide dissemination of values and the establishment of a moral "character" in organizations (King et al., 2010; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1957). We offer a more detailed account of the way in which a moral system in organizations is established and then, through ongoing interactions, maintained or revised over time. Where Selznick (1957) previously highlighted the role of leaders as "statesmen" in this process, but in a very general manner, we flesh out what such a form of leadership entails and how it is instrumental to the establishment of a moral character in the organization through initially *reformist boundary work* and then maintained through *conservative boundary work* (as depicted in Figure 1). As such, and despite the fact that macro scholars after Selznick (but see Kraatz, 2009) have, for the most part, avoided the mention of leadership (preferring labels such as "institutional entrepreneurship" instead), we show the potency of seeing leadership as a form of institutional work that emergent leaders and followers engage in to establish, revise, or maintain moral systems in organizations.

Values-based leadership. With the focus on the *institutional embeddedness* of moral leadership, our theorizing prompts further research to examine existing theorizing about values-based leadership with a fresh pair of eyes, such that we may better bring out their respective contributions to moral behavior in organizations. We first of all advocate a greater emphasis on process studies that trace the values-based actions of leaders and examine in detail the interactions between leaders and followers to see how a new moral system, as an interaction order, is established.

With our theorizing, we also draw attention to the strengths and limitations of existing values-based leadership constructs. For this purpose, we offer itemized comparisons between existing treatments of values-based leadership (specifically, ethical leadership, responsible leadership, charismatic leadership, and the full range model of leadership), various approaches to reformist institutional work (institutional entrepreneurship, institutional work, values work, issue selling), and our own treatment of moral leadership behaviors that are implied in reformist boundary work around moral systems (Table 1). Moreover, we have done the same for conservative boundary work around moral systems, and compared them with relevant values-based leadership and institutional work approaches (Table 2).

An itemized comparison teaches us that our treatment of moral leadership taps into a broader set of leadership behaviors than what can be captured by existing values-based leadership constructs. For instance, the presently dominant theories in values-based leadership (i.e., social exchange theory and social learning theory) share a great deal of variance around leaders' behavioral consistency with moral universals (e.g., honesty, caring for followers, integrity), such that it breeds trust and high-quality exchanges between leaders and followers (see Hoch et al., 2018; Lemoine et al., 2019; Pless, 2007; Mumford & Fried, 2014). While our theory of moral leadership does account for the alignment with moral universals, we have expanded the criterion of moral leadership from followers' perceptions of a leader's benevolence and trustworthiness (however important) into their ability and actions to transform or safeguard a moral *system*. In support of this proposed analytical shift, we have offered a new theoretical mechanism for the study of values-based leadership (i.e., boundary work around moral systems) that is capable of accounting for, and explaining, the potential *systemic* impact of leadership behaviors. We expect that attuning the measurement of moral leadership to (a) boundary work practices as a new generative mechanism for moral leadership and (b) transforming or safeguarding the moral system as ultimate criterion for moral leadership would solve some of the discriminant validity issues that still bedevil moral and ethical leadership approaches to date (see Hoch et al., 2018; Lemoine et al., 2019).

In addition, current definitions of the ethical leadership construct mainly touch upon control-oriented elements in conservative boundary work (see Table 2). This is because of the fact that the current measure strongly emphasizes followers' conformity to normative standards (e.g., Lemoine et al., 2019; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Treviño et al., 1998) to the degree that followers may even interpret such leader behaviors as overly controlling and judgmental (Stouten et al., 2013). While control is indeed important in the context of conservative boundary work, a new measure for ethical leadership that is built around conservative boundary work as a theoretical backdrop may want to incorporate *developmentally* oriented boundary work as well, in order to obtain a more complete image (see Table 2). Importantly, what is not incorporated in the current ethical leadership measure is the notion of

TABLE 1
Reformist Boundary Work and an Itemized Comparison with Adjacent Constructs

		Macro literatures[a]				Micro literatures[b]			
Action type	**Reformist boundary work practices**	**IS**	**IE**	**IW**	**VW**	**EL**	**FRML**	**CH**	**RL**
AWARENESS DEFIANCE (*initiating*)	Sensing needs and opportunities	X	X				IL	X	X
	Frame breaking (re-keying)		X	X	X		IS	X	
	Diagnostic framing			X			IS		
	Leveraging contradictions		X						
	Moral courage							X	
	Emotion-laden leader signaling	X					IC/II(A)	X	X
	Reference to moral universals				X	MP	II(B)		X
	Envisioning (prognostic frame)		X	X	X		II (B)	X	X
	Building collective efficacy						IC/II(A)	X	
	Setting new normative standards					MM			
BUILDING COALITIONS (*scaling up*)	Securing/taking away fear	X		X	X				
	Forming strategic alliances	X	X						
	Working the bureaucracy								
	Find supportive multipliers/ mobilizing stakeholders		X		X				X
	Relational intelligence		X						X
	Stay grounded in convictions					X			X
	Building trust and reputation				X	MP	II(A)	X	
	Resource mobilization		X				CR		
	Persistence and patience	X							
NEGOTIATING (*scaling up*)	Define and break issue down	X							
	Provide catered solutions	X							
	Maintain dialogue								X
	Respectful of others' views	X			X				X
	Frame blending/laminating								
	Create win–wins	X							X
	Leverage small wins	X							
	Mindful of hidden needs/incentives	X							
	Working toward morally recognizable settlement	X							

Notes:
[a] IS = issue selling (Wickert & de Bakker, 2018); IE = institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009); IW = institutional work; VW = values work.
[b] IC1 = inspirational communication; IC2 = Individualized consideration; II(A) = idealized influence (attributed); II(B) idealized influence (behavior); IL = instrumental leadership dimension; IS = intellectual stimulation; MM = moral manager aspect of ethical leadership; MP = moral person aspect of ethical leadership. EL = ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005); FRML = full range model of leadership; CH = charismatic leadership (Antonakis et al., 2016; Conger & Kanungo, 1998); RL = responsible leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006; Maak et al., 2016; Pless, 2007).
X = this practice is part of designated construct.

emergent moral leadership, including an important range of "statesmanship" practices that help scale up new moral framings throughout the organization (see Table 1, "building coalitions" and "negotiating"). While the "responsible leadership" approach does emphasize more "integrative" practices of CEOs (Maak et al., 2016), it remains a micro-level approach, emphasizing a formal leadership style, executed by sitting top-level executives acting as guardians of a particular moral status quo. This is theoretically different from our *process* approach, which emphasizes the *emergence* of such leadership and the subsequent *reform* of a moral system.

It is also worth noting, in that regard, that what is consensually conceived as "transformational" leadership practices within the full range model of leadership (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999) should not be interpreted as necessarily "reformist" in nature, in light of our theory. For instance, to capture transformational leadership, scholars oftentimes use the degree of "follower internalization of their organization's moral values" as a criterion for followers' moral development (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002: 736). This measure, however, is indicative of an orientation toward the conservation of a moral system, and not its reform. The fact that "transformational leadership" shows a

TABLE 2
Conservative Boundary Work and an Itemized Comparison with Adjacent Constructs[a,b]

Conservative boundary practices	Key reference	Control vs. development emphasis	IW[c]	EL	FRML	CH	RL
Path–goal facilitation (KPIs)	Antonakis and House (2014)	Control	X		IL		
Reformulating strategy/core values	Antonakis and House (2014)	Control			IL		X
Divesting and clean up	Brown and Treviño (2006)	Control		MM			
Construct normative networks	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)	Control	X	O			
Formalizing moral standards	Weber (1947/1978)	Control	X				X
Policing and (outcome) monitoring	Zietsma and Lawrence (2010)	Control	X	MM	IL		
Deterring	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)	Control	X	MM			
Enable and promote elites to key positions	Weber and Waeger (2017)	Control	X	O			
Repetition of characteristic values and frames	Lakoff (2016)	Control	X	MM	II(B)	X	X
Determine degree of coupling with external constituents	Weber and Waeger (2017)	Control					
Educating and modeling	Brown and Treviño (2006)	Development	X	MM		X	
Critical decisions based on high moral standards	Selznick (1957)	Development		MP			X
Translating exogenous shocks	Conger and Kanungo (1998)	Development				X	
Positive anchoring in societal discourses	Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)	Development	X		IS	X	
Negative anchoring vis-à-vis societal discourses	Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey (2008)	Development	X		IS	X	
Alignment with moral universals in words and deeds	Lemoine et al. (2019)	Development		MP	II(A)	X	X
Mythologizing	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)	Development	X		IC	X	X
Ongoing performativity of values in ritualized practices	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)	Development	X				
Constructing a common identity	Selznick (1957) on "character"	Development	X		IC	X	X
System updating or renewal	Zietsma and Lawrence (2010)	Development	X				

[a] IW = institutional work; EL = ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005); FRML = full range model of leadership (Antonakis & House, 2014; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999); CH = charismatic leadership; RL = responsible leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006; Maak et al., 2016; Pless, 2007).
[b] MP = moral person aspect of EL; MM = moral manager aspect of EL; O = outcome of EL (Lemoine et al., 2019). IS = intellectual stimulation; IC1 = inspirational communication; II(A) = idealized influence (attributed); II(B) idealized influence (behavior); IL = instrumental leadership dimension (Antonakis & House, 2014).
[c] X = this practice is part of designated construct.

corrected correlation as high as .70 with the ethical leadership construct (Hoch et al., 2018) is another case in point, as the latter is known to capture an individual's conformity with a moral regime (Lemoine et al., 2019; Mayer et al., 2009; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). To wit, it is Burns's (1978: 249) own original work that reads: "The ultimate success of leaders is tested not by peoples' delight in a performance or personality but by *actual social change* measured by ideologists' purposes, programs, and values" (emphasis in the original). The present literature on transformational leadership has thus, in effect, subsumed the disruption *and* protection of moral boundaries under the same banner (see an itemized analysis in Tables 1 and 2). Here, it is confusing when leadership studies use reformist language (e.g., connotations belonging to the word "transformational") while using established measures and criteria that presume conservative leadership practices (Thompson, 2011). We argue that conflating two distinct opposite leadership functions under the same banner is confusing unless there is an explicit temporal narrative that logically integrates the two (see our Figure 1). Our process theory may thus provide necessary clarity by distinguishing between reformist boundary work as the initial

leadership process (Table 1) and conservative boundary work (Table 2) as a secondary process that logically follows the other in time.

In line with these contributions, we believe that future scale construction for survey and experimental research may benefit from distinguishing emergent and incumbent moral leadership (or "guardianship') as *separate constructs*, while conceptualizing the various steps that we have outlined (Figure 1 and Table 1) as either temporally sequential or latent factors. After all, emergent moral leadership and incumbent moral leadership have distinct institutionalizing functions (i.e., disrupting vs. maintaining boundaries), and are expected to follow one another over time in an iterative fashion. Again, making such distinctions will help build measurement scales that have greater discriminant validity.

As a final comment, we have built our process theory of moral leadership with a notion of bottom-up moral regime change in mind (Sonenshein, 2016). Yet, we realize that both the ethical and responsible leadership constructs strictly emphasize top-down leadership, whereby moral leaders set the tone from the top (e.g., Maak et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 2009; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Indeed, most of the moral initiatives we read about, even the cases in which leaders spur change in moral systems, seem to be initiated by top-level executives (e.g., Paul Polman at Unilever, Ray Anderson at Interface). In addition, moral leaders at the lower and mid-levels of an organization may not be noticed because they are suppressed or blocked by others in the organization, and may not even be given due credit because their initiatives are ultimately ratified by the headline-grabbing final actions of senior leaders such as CEOs, executive directors, and public officials. Indeed, CEOs and directors do have a crucial role to play, since creating a powerful guiding coalition is crucial also for low- and mid-level-ranked emergent moral leaders to initiate change (Table 1). Even if moral regime changes spurred by low- to mid-level moral leaders are less conspicuous, they *do happen* and they do have impact (for examples, see Berg, 2018; Creed et al., 2010; Davis & White, 2015; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). As such, and as we have argued in this paper, these cases of emergent leadership should be acknowledged as phenomena that are worthy of study.

CONCLUSION

Despite the significance of moral leadership within organizations, the subject has not been adequately theorized in a cross-disciplinary manner because of the division of labor between micro and macro research. We draw on micro-level leadership research and Selznick's (1957) initial writings on the subject, and use that as a base from which to develop a process theory of moral leadership. We have discussed the emergence of moral leadership as a situation wherein individuals take a moral stance on an issue, convince others to do the same, and together spur social change by revising a moral system. In the spirit of Selznick (1957), we have argued that the most lasting and integrative revisions of moral systems will come from leaders acting as "statespersons" who skillfully mediate between conflicting values and beliefs and will themselves come to embody the organization's moral "character," as a beacon of recognition.

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