

Procedural Justice Rules in Teachers' Moral Dilemmas at Work

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The present study intends to contribute to the comprehension of morality in professional contexts, by investigating its relationship with justice perceptions. Sixty-nine elementary, middle and high school teachers were given a questionnaire with open questions. Content analysis demonstrated that the majority of participants (75%) spontaneously mentioned procedural justice rules (Leventhal, 1980), ethicality being the most referred rule. The most referred dilemmas involved reacting to transgressions (Wark & Krebs, 1996). These results are discussed considering the need for socially responsible and ethically concerned organizations to recognize the moral experiences and justice conceptions of their workers.

KEY-WORDS: moral dilemmas; procedural justice rules; teachers' professional ethics.

Introduction

Although morality and justice have, over the years and in an independent fashion, been raising the interest of researchers coming from many different geographical and academic areas, the intersection of these two domains of study requires further investigation, as the relationship between the two constructs has been clearly enunciated (Kohlberg, 1981).

Myyry and Helkama (2002) managed to explore that intersection, by conducting a study in which the use of procedural justice rules (Leventhal, 1980) in individual moral reasoning was investigated. The authors found that individuals made use of less procedural justice rules in hypothetical dilemmas than in self-generated ones. This result suggests the potential underestimation of the importance of the role played by procedural justice rules in real-life morality due to the almost exclusive reliance on hypothetical dilemmas in research articles.

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Actually, even though morality has been extensively studied, for the most part by psychologists and philosophers, the study of real-life morality has been largely neglected. Designed to elicit individuals' highest level of competence, the dominant methodology used to assess moral reasoning and development has consisted of: first, confronting subjects with classical philosophical and hypothetical dilemmas; then, asking them a set of probing questions; finally, scoring the ideas and thoughts expressed according to established rules (Colby et al., 1987). Some criticism has nonetheless been raised over this research paradigm, because it is hypothesized that individuals may feel less identified and involved with tasks that are unfamiliar or irrelevant to them (Walker, de Vries & Trevethan, 1987, p. 842). Controversies aside, the fact, according to Wark and Krebs (1996), is that:

Of the hundreds of studies on moral judgment, only a few have investigated what, it would seem, we ultimately want to understand – how people make moral decisions in their everyday lives. It is somewhat disconcerting to consider how much we have learned about people's judgments about Heinz and his dilemma, and how little we have learned about real-life moral judgment. (pp. 220-221)

This concern is even more relevant in a context in which business scandals have led theorists and managers to increasingly devote their attention to ethical and moral dilemmas people are confronted with at work (Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes, 2007). Actually, the word *Ethics* is nowadays part of organizations' lexis and practices (Enriquez, 1997).

Among this, schools are work contexts particularly embedded in moral considerations. The classroom is a privileged area of potential ethical intervention, through the education of morally responsible and conscious citizens. Any teacher experiences dilemmatic situations in his or her daily work activities. Tirri and Puolimatka's (2000) study supports this view. The authors asked secondary school teachers and students from two different Finnish schools to identify moral dilemmas occurring in their learning contexts. Teachers' behaviour was the major focus of the dilemmatic situations reported, which were mainly related to punishing, grading, maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive issues privately confided by students, or preserving an unbiased attitude towards pupils. Seiça (2003) also investigated dilemmas in a Portuguese secondary school. Her sample was only composed of teachers, who primarily mentioned dilemmas related to professional relations and dilemmas related to pedagogical practice. Under the scope of professional relations, questioning or not a work colleague about his or her individual criteria for action was the most frequently described dilemmatic situation. In what concerns dilemmas related to pedagogical practice, all the teachers mentioned the difficult choice between being exigent and rigorous and thus privileging the best students, or being less demanding and meticulous in order to integrate the higher possible number of students in the educative system.

The present study was designed to address three main objectives in this domain:

(1) To analyze the intersection between morality and justice by ascertaining if teachers mentioned any procedural justice rules in a spontaneous, not induced manner, in their reasoning about the moral dilemmas they had experienced. Although Myyry and Helkama's (2002) results demonstrated the importance of procedural justice rules in individuals' real-life moral decision-making, we focused our analyses in a different professional context from that analysed by Myyry and Helkama (2002): while our sample was composed of teachers working in elementary, middle and high schools, theirs consisted of university students with work experience.

(2) To contribute to a better understanding of real-life moral reasoning in work situations by analyzing the types of moral dilemmas teachers reported being confronted with in their professional routines.

(3) To explore the context-specificity of procedural justice rules by determining if specific dilemmas elicited the reference to particular rules.

Procedural justice

Early definitions of justice (1960s-1970s) in psychology were proposed under the influence of social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and equity theory (Adams, 1965). They mainly focused distributive concerns or "the fair share-out of rewards" (Adams, 1965, p. 272). In accordance with this *homo economicus* model, social interactions were conceived as exchanges guided by continuous subjective cost-benefit analyses (Stitka, 2009). However, research demonstrated that distributive fairness assessments are frequently biased in favour of one's self-profit (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

During the late 1970s and 1980s, theorists and researchers started to acknowledge that equitable outcomes were not enough for individuals to define a social situation as fair. The procedures used to make decisions about the allocation of those outcomes were also considered important. Not only the result of the decision, but also how the decision was made, was taken into account (Stitka & Crosby, 2003). For instance, the opportunity to exercise process control over the decision by presenting relevant information was considered crucial for a decision-making procedure to be seen as fair (Thibaut & Walker, 1978). Initial conceptions were still influenced by an instrumental perspective, as the opportunity to exert control over the process was conceived as a way to exert control over the result (Valentim & Helkama, 2011). Procedural fairness was defined as "an individual's perception of the fairness of procedural components of the social system that regulate the

allocative process” (Leventhal, 1980, p. 35). Under this framework, Leventhal (1980) postulated six procedural justice rules (*Consistency, Bias Suppression, Accuracy, Correctability, Representativeness, and Ethicality*) to evaluate the fairness of allocative procedures.

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Almost immediately, however, studies started revealing that interpersonal features such as quality of treatment exerted large influence over procedural justice judgments. The interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986) could be considered a third type of justice, beyond distributive and procedural justice. A *homo socialis* perspective framed research over this hypothesis (Stitka, 2009). Procedures were not conceived as strictly mechanisms for making allocation decisions anymore. Instead, they were defined as contexts of social interaction (Tyler & Blader, 2003). According to Theotónio and Vala (1999), interactional justice has been used to refer to the “perceptions about the quality of the interpersonal treatment received during organizational processes” (p. 54), but it remains unclear whether it is an independent dimension or a specific component of procedural justice. Besides, other studies prone in favour of a four dimensional model of justice: distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Even in the presence of this new framework, the relevance of procedural justice in the organizational domain was not questioned, because it has proven to be significantly related to leadership evaluation (Tyler & Caine, 1981), decision acceptance, creation and maintenance of internal values, voluntary cooperative behaviour, willingness to follow social rules (Tyler, 2001), compliance behaviour (Murphy & Tyler, 2008), job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance and trust (Colquitt et al., 2001). On the other hand, procedural injustice at work is negatively correlated with job satisfaction and psychosomatic well-being (Schmitt & Dorfel, 1999).

The applicability of the procedural justice rules defined by Leventhal (1980) was also not rejected. According to Myyry and Helkama (2002, p. 374), “although not all moral conflict situations deal with allocation, procedural justice rules seem to be more broadly applicable to moral decision-making”. The *Consistency* rule implies that the procedure should be applied consistently across persons (requiring equal treatment for all affected by the procedure) and across time (which means that the procedure should follow the same rule each time it is used, and that the procedural changes should be made carefully and with full notification of all who might be affected by the procedure). The *Bias-Suppression* rule dictates that the decision maker should not be influenced by his or her vested interest in the decision or by prior beliefs so that all points of view do not get equal or adequate consideration. The *Accuracy* rule means that decisions should be based on accurate information and on well-informed or expert opinion. The *Correctability* rule implies

that a procedure should contain some provision for correcting bad decisions. The *Representativeness* rule dictates that those affected by the decision should have influence on the process, and the opportunity to express their opinion. The *Ethicality* rule means that the procedure should conform to standards of ethics.

Following Myyry and Helkama's (2002) theoretical propositions and empirical results, we hypothesize that individuals refer to these rules when faced with situations of moral conflict and uncertainty:

H1: When asked to report a personally experienced moral dilemma, respondents spontaneously mention procedural justice rules.

Moral dilemmas

According to Kohlberg (1981, p. 280), "a moral dilemma may be defined as a state of social disequilibrium characterized by the unresolved conflicting claims of individuals". For Myyry (2004, p. 18), "it could be claimed that usually a moral issue arises when the goals, plans, desires, and expectations of people are in conflict". Therefore, moral dilemmas are intrinsically connected to role taking (Kohlberg, 1981) or social perspective taking (Myyry & Helkama, 2007), and thus have, undoubtedly, a social ground.

This social ground is patent in Wark and Krebs' (1996) classification of real-life moral dilemmas. These authors have proposed a typology that distinguishes between *Antisocial* dilemmas, dilemmas involving *Social Pressure*, and *Prosocial* dilemmas. *Antisocial* dilemmas have two subtypes: *Reacting to Transgressions* and *Reacting to Temptation*. *Reacting to Transgressions* is a kind of dilemma in which a decision must be made about how to react, what to do about a transgression, injustice, crime, or violation of rules that has occurred. *Reacting to Temptation* is a situation in which the participant is faced with temptation to meet his or her needs, fulfil his or her desires, acquire resources, advance his or her gain by behaving dishonestly, immorally, unfairly, or ungratefully. In dilemmas characterized by *Social Pressure* to violate one's values or identity, the participant feels pressured, either implicitly or explicitly, by another person or group to engage in identity-inconsistent behaviours that violate his or her values. *Prosocial* dilemmas are subdivided into *Reacting to Conflicting Demands* and *Reacting to the Needs of Others*. In a *Reacting to Conflicting Demands* type of dilemma, the participant is faced with two or more people making inconsistent demands on him or her, often with implications for their friendship, and must decide whom to help or whose expectations to fulfil. *Reacting to the Needs of Others* is a type of dilemma in which a person feels conflicted about whether or not he or she is responsible for engaging in some proactive behaviour in another's behalf and what his or her duties or responsibilities are toward the person in question.

These different types of dilemmas confront individuals with very distinct challenges and diverse moral-decision contexts and implications. Leventhal (1980) suggested that the different procedural justice rules would be selectively chosen by individuals according to the distinct situations they were confronted with, and several studies have supported this suggestion (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Colquitt & Jackson, 2006; Myyry & Helkama, 2002). Considering the demonstrated context sensitivity of the procedural justice rules, we propose to investigate the following hypothesis:

H2: The reference to specific procedural justice rules will be related to the type of moral dilemma reported.

Moral dilemmas and gender. Gender differences in moral judgement have been widely explored, especially since Gilligan (1982) hypothesized the existence of gender-specific moral orientations:

The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the “real and recognizable trouble” of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfilment. (p. 100)

Men’s moral thought would therefore be characterized by a justice orientation, but women’s morality would be care-oriented. This hypothesis thus questioned Kohlberg’s (1981) view on the centrality of justice on moral reasoning. According to Gilligan (1982), the “feminine voice” (p. 105) had been excluded from previous developmental theories, and therefore the importance of the concepts of responsibility and care in the construction of morality had been neglected. Gilligan’s (1982) work was part of a theoretical and political movement that intended to identify forms of social pressure exerted towards women (Amâncio, 2003). Psychological research was particularly criticized by authors that integrated this movement for neglecting the feminine reality (Amâncio, 1994).

However, other authors (Pratt, Golding, Hunter & Sampson, 1988; Walker et al., 1987) have investigated the gender differences hypothesized by Gilligan (1982) and concluded that, when those differences did exist, they were dependent on the presence of many other factors. One of those factors, dilemma content, has been shown to exert a major influence on whether moral reasoning is more care- or justice-oriented (e.g., Agerstrom, Moller & Archer, 2006; Crandall, Tsang, Goldman & Pennington, 1999; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). These studies have been conducted using dilemmas that were not personally experienced by participants.

Nonetheless, allowing participants to report personally experienced moral dilemmas also leads to differences in the content described by men and women (Skoie, Pratt, Mathews & Curror, 1996). Following this line of thought, Wark and Krebs (1996)

came to an interesting conclusion: the differences in moral orientations between genders were not as pronounced as the differences in types of dilemmas reported by men and women. Specifically, in their study, women had a clearer tendency to report *Prosocial* types of dilemmas, while men tended to report *Antisocial* types of dilemmas. In another study (1997), the same authors found that men reported experiencing more *Antisocial* types of dilemma in real-life than did women. Although women did not report being confronted with more *Prosocial* types of dilemma than did men, they attributed more significance to these types of dilemma than men did. Thus, the authors (Wark & Krebs, 2000) suggest that the tendency for men and women to report different types of dilemmas may be a result of (a) their differential experiences, which make men more likely than women to be confronted with *Antisocial* types of dilemmas, and (b) their distinct socialization processes, which make women more likely than men to attach more significance to *Prosocial* dilemmas.

While attempting to ensure that women's voice would be heard, the hypothesis of a feminine morality (Gilligan, 1982) failed to integrate women's behaviour in theoretical models (Amâncio, 1994) and contributed to the perpetuation of the stereotype that had silenced that voice: the idea of a gender-specific identity, opposing the expressive characteristics of women to the instrumental features of men (Lourenço, 2002). On the other hand, Wark and Krebs' (1996) work reflects the current conception of gender, not as an attribute of specific individuals, but as the result of the confluence of culture, language, practices and institutions (Amâncio, 2003).

The interest of further exploring Wark and Krebs' (1996) results obtained in Canada was, in our research, increased by the fact that we would be studying a sample with a different cultural background.

Therefore, we proposed to test the following hypothesis:

H3: Male respondents report more Antisocial types of dilemma than female respondents, and female respondents report more Prosocial types of dilemma than male respondents.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 69 elementary, middle and high public school teachers working in schools in the north and centre of Portugal. The mean age was 46 ($SD = 10.62$) and 71% were females, reflecting the demographic structure

of the population under study in Portugal (74% females). The average job tenure was 21 ($SD = 10.92$) and 52 (75 %) participants were part of the schools' permanent staff.

Data were collected between July 2008 and May 2009. For most of the respondents the questionnaire was delivered at school and filled out at home. For some participants ($n = 7$) the questionnaire was e-mailed. A deadline (2 weeks) was determined for complete questionnaires to be returned. The questionnaire took about half an hour to complete. Anonymity was guaranteed and participation was voluntary.

Measures

All the questions that were adapted from previous works were translated to Portuguese and then back-translated to English. A preliminary version of the questionnaire was filled out by three experienced teachers. A group discussion session was then conducted in which they were invited to make general comments on the questionnaire fulfilment process and to address specific issues concerning translation accuracy, item comprehensibility and questionnaire consistency. The suggestions made were recorded and, where appropriate, incorporated.

The final version of the questionnaire included: (a) questions designed to collect demographic data, and (b) a set of five open questions, adapted from previous works (Myrsky & Helkama, 2002, 2007; Skoe, Eisenberg & Cumberland, 2002; Walker et al., 1987; Wark & Krebs, 1996), to obtain qualitative information on the dilemmatic situation experienced by respondents.

Participants started by providing information on their gender, age, years working as teachers and whether they were part of the schools' permanent staff. They were then asked to report a moral dilemma they had personally experienced in the school in which they were currently working. Although in previous studies participants were just asked to recall a significant real-life moral conflict (Wark & Krebs, 1996), a moral conflict they had personally experienced (Myrsky & Helkama, 2007; Skoe et al., 2002), or a recent real-life dilemma (Walker et al., 1987), we decided, following Myrsky and Helkama's research (2002), to limit the context of occurrence of the dilemma to a work situation. Instructions also made clear that the dilemma should have been characterized by uncertainty about what was the right thing to do. Teachers were then asked to answer a set of probe questions, taken from previous works (Myrsky & Helkama, 2007; Skoe et al., 2002; Walker et al., 1987): "What were the conflicts for you in that situation?"; "In thinking about what to do, what did you consider?"; "Did you think it was the right thing to do? Why?" An average number of 111 words were produced in response to this set of questions.

Scoring

We used Bardin's (2008) technique of content analysis to identify: (a) the procedural justice rules mentioned according to Leventhal's early writings (1980) and Myyry and Helkama's recent (2002) theoretical updates (i.e. applicability of procedural justice rules to moral contexts) and methodological considerations (e.g. only when a procedure is mentioned in the participant's reasoning should the statement be considered as an instance of a procedural justice rule), and (b) the type of dilemma reported according to Wark & Krebs' typology (1996). We then asked two independent raters, blind to the purposes of our research and to all other information about participants, to score a sample (15%) of the questionnaires.

Following Field (2005a, 2005b), we used Kendall's *W* coefficient to assess the agreement between raters (Kendall & Smith, 1939). In what concerns Leventhal's (1980) procedural justice rules, the difficulty to reach an agreement was high (we obtained a Kendall's *W* coefficient of 0.5), mainly due to the fact that the rules are not exclusive (Leventhal, 1980). We decided to retain only the classifications in which at least two raters agreed in order to ensure the quality of our data.

As for Wark and Krebs' (1996) typology, we obtained a value of 0.6, which represents a moderate level of agreement among raters. In the majority of the cases in which disagreements occurred, they were resolved by re-analyzing the protocols and returning to the definitions and examples provided by the authors. However, when the difficulty to reach a solution persisted because respondents reported more than one dilemma, we identified, focusing on the questionnaire as a whole, the major concern, the most problematic issue for the participant.

Results

Procedural justice rules

The large majority of our respondents (75%, $p < .0001$ with binomial test), when asked to recall and report a moral dilemma experienced in a professional context, spontaneously referred to procedural justice rules. Our first hypothesis was thus endorsed.

Ethicality was the most frequently mentioned rule (23 participants, 27,1% of the sample), immediately followed by *Consistency* and *Accuracy of Information* (19 participants, 22,4% of the sample). *Representativeness* (13 participants, 15,3% of the sample), *Bias Suppression* (8 participants, 9,4% of the sample), and *Correctability* (3 participants, 3,5% of the sample) were the least referred. Table 1 presents these results in frequencies.

Table 1. Number of Procedural Justice Rules Used as a Function of Dilemma Type

Dilemma type	Parti- cants <i>n</i>	Justice Rule (Observed Frequencies)						Σ
		Consist- ency	Bias Sup- pression	Accuracy	Correcta- bility	Represent- ativeness	Ethi- cality	
Antisocial	35	11	3	13	0	6	11	44
Social Pressure	8	5	2	0	1	1	3	12
Prosocial	26	3	3	6	2	6	9	29
Σ	69	19	8	19	3	13	23	85

Moral dilemmas

The most frequently reported types of dilemma were *Reacting to Transgressions* (31 participants, 45% of the sample) and *Reacting to the Needs of Others* (23 participants, 33%). *Social Pressure* was mentioned by eight respondents (12%), *Reacting to Temptation* by four (6%) and *Reacting to Conflicting Demands* by three (4%).

In what concerns the resolution of the dilemma, the majority of the participants (87%) reported believing that they had made the right decision. When confronted with the question “Did you think it was the right thing to do?”, only 6% of the respondents answered “no” (all had reported *Reacting to Transgressions* dilemmas) and 7% of the participants gave answers codified as “don’t know” (two had reported *Reacting to Transgressions* dilemmas, other two described *Social Pressure* dilemmas and one mentioned a *Reacting to the Needs of Others* dilemma).

Moral dilemmas and procedural justice rules. With Kruskal-Wallis a significant difference in the use of the rule *Consistency* was found between *Antisocial*, *Prosocial* and *Social Pressure* dilemmas, $H(2) = 8.38, p < .05$. Mann-Whitney tests were used to follow up this finding. A Bonferroni correction was applied so all effects are reported at a .0167 level of significance. A tendency for participants reporting *Social Pressure* dilemmas to mention proportionally more the *Consistency* rule than participants reporting *Prosocial* dilemmas was identified, $U = 51.00, p = .003$. These results were only partially in line with our second hypothesis, which proposed that the reference to specific procedural justice rules would be related to the type of moral dilemma reported. No differences were found between participants reporting *Antisocial*, *Prosocial* and *Social Pressure* dilemmas on the number of procedural justice rules mentioned, $F(2,66) = .48, p = .62$.

Moral dilemmas and gender. According to our third hypothesis, male respondents would report more *Antisocial* types of dilemma than female participants, and female participants would report more *Prosocial* types of dilemma than male respondents. Contradicting what was expected on the basis of previous works

(Wark & Krebs, 1996), this hypothesis was not supported. There was not a significant association between gender and the type of dilemma reported, $\chi^2(1, N = 61) = 0.02, p = .89$.

Discussion

Our first objective was to analyze the intersection between morality and justice by ascertaining if, when reasoning about moral dilemmas experienced in professional contexts, teachers would refer to procedural justice rules. The most important conclusion derived from this study was that, in fact, they do. This result supported our first hypothesis and was in line with Myyry and Helkama's (2002) results. The use of open questions makes this result even more interesting, because participants were not induced to mention any procedural justice rules, they spontaneously included them in their reasoning about the situations of moral conflict they had been confronted with. Besides, the fact that we decided to retain only the cases in which at least two scorers agreed on the identification of the rules mentioned expands our confidence in these results. This finding represents a fundamental step in our intentions to contribute to a better understanding of real-life morality. The fact that two different samples from two culturally divergent countries spontaneously mentioned procedural justice rules while reasoning about situations of moral uncertainty may suggest the pervasiveness of those rules in face of morally diffuse scenarios.

Ethicality, Consistency and Accuracy of Information were the most frequently mentioned rules. Their importance as key criteria used to characterize a fair procedure, especially in real-life moral dilemmas, had been previously demonstrated (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Myyry & Helkama, 2002).

In our sample, a tendency was identified for *Reacting to Transgressions* to be the most frequently mentioned type of dilemma. It is interesting to remark that punishment issues were also among the types of dilemmas primarily referred by secondary school teachers in such a culturally distant country as Finland (Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000).

The majority of the respondents in our study believed to have made the right decision when confronted with the situation of moral conflict. One must wonder if this sharply differentiated distribution represents a real tendency, that is, if in fact such a small minority of teachers were sure that they had not made the right decision. Any morally dilemmatic situation places the moral agent in face of a choice between two mutually exclusive but similarly persuasive courses of action,

so the final decision will most probably contradict or neglect some aspect of his will or belief (Marcus, 1980; Swedene, 2005). The question of whether teachers actually felt confident about their choices or were impelled by question formulation to provide answers reflecting social desirability is thus a matter of further exploration. Besides, we acknowledge that the use of retrospective measures and the fact that we asked for written as opposed to oral reports can have influence on the results obtained.

All the participants who thought they had not made the right choice had been confronted with *Reacting to Transgressions* dilemmas. Even though the small number of respondents included in this group (31) recommends cautious interpretations, it is interesting to remark that this is the only type of dilemma concerned with an action that has already occurred. In fact, in all dilemmas except *Reacting to Transgressions*, the focus is oriented towards the future: (a) in *Reacting to Temptation* dilemmas, individuals are faced with temptation to behave in a dishonest, immoral, unfair or ungrateful manner; (b) in *Social Pressure* dilemmas, people feel pressured to engage in identity-inconsistent behaviours; (c) in *Reacting to Conflicting Demands* dilemmas, the individuals are faced with inconsistent demands and must decide whose expectations to fulfil; (d) in *Reacting to the Needs of Others* dilemmas, people feel conflicted about their responsibility for engaging in some proactive behaviour in another's behalf. *Reacting to Transgressions* dilemmas also involve a decision that has to be made about an action (or reaction) that will take place in the future. However, this decision concerns a situation that already has happened and that, one may hypothesize, already confronts the individual with a violation to his or her moral codes and standards. Therefore, a certain sense of wrong may already be implied in this type of dilemma. Any option may somehow be considered incorrect, regardless of whether the agent acts for the best or not (Swedene, 2005). We must nonetheless emphasize once again that the tendency identified cannot be interpreted as definitive or conclusive and must be subject to additional investigation.

Our second hypothesis predicted that the reference to specific procedural justice rules would be related to the type of moral dilemma reported. Only a tendency for participants reporting *Social Pressure* dilemmas to mention proportionally more the *Consistency* rule than participants reporting *Prosocial* dilemmas was identified. Hence, it seems that when participants feel pressured by another person or group to engage in identity-inconsistent behaviours that violate their values, they stress the importance of acting consistently across persons and across time.

The third hypothesis concerned the existence of gender differences in the types of moral dilemmas teachers were confronted with in their professional contexts. This hypothesis was not endorsed. Cultural differences may be on the basis of the disparity of the results found in our study and in Wark and Krebs' (1996) research.

In fact, if we take into account the work of Hofstede (2001), masculinity prevails in Canada but not in Portugal, that can be considered a "feminine country". Therefore, it is not unreasonable to speculate that masculine countries such as Canada the confluence of culture, language, practices and institutions (Amâncio, 2003) may present men and women with distinct dilemmatic experiences or influence them to attribute different significance to the Antisocial and Prosocial dilemmas they are confronted with, whereas in feminine countries the differences between men's and women's experiences and interpretations may not be as sharp.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study intended to improve our understanding about real-life morality, by exploring the types of dilemmas teachers were confronted with in their daily work activities and the procedural justice rules they referred to, if they did refer any, when reasoning about those situations. Krebs, Denton and Wark (1997) had already alerted to the fact that normative models of morality were subject to many criticisms and that a model of real-life morality should be developed. Myyry (2004) had also stated that abstract moral reasoning would not necessarily explain individuals' moral behaviour, thus recommending that future research would focus on real experiences. Clegg et al. (2007) had proposed that the introduction of ethics into organizational practice should be accomplished by the analysis of contextually-specific situations. Waddock, Mahon, Michalos, Poff, and Benkert (2006) had also emphasized the potential of focusing on "how managers actually deal with ethical conflicts" (p. 342).

Therefore, our study has also implications for ethics management in organizations. Despite the growing interest, demonstrated by prestigious journals, on ethics and social responsibility (Donaldson, 2003), there is a need for an articulation between research published by those journals and actions taken by practitioners in organizational contexts (Waddock et al., 2006). Our study tries to promote this articulation by focusing on situations lived by real people in real professional contexts, as an attempt to disseminate knowledge on the types of dilemmas people are facing in their work experiences and how they are dealing with them. As Giacalone and Thompson (2006, p. 262) affirm: "concern for business ethics and social responsibility must go beyond traditional philosophical foci toward more positive management and behaviourally focused approaches".

Due to the fact that we focused our analyses on a sample of public school teachers, our study can also have an impact on the education sector. According to Seiça (2003), ethicality in teachers' actions and behaviours has been scarcely studied, but

represents a topic of fundamental interest, because some of the basic competences that are required from teachers are ethical competences. Besides, participants in her study defined teaching as a job characterized by ethical imperatives. Our results alert to the importance that teachers attribute to fair procedures when confronted with dilemmatic situations.

To increase the confidence in the tendencies identified, this study should be replicated with a larger sample. This would also enable some hypotheses concerning the explanation of those tendencies to be tested – we could, for instance, understand if some of the disparities between this study and researches conducted by other authors resulted from our small sample size or represent real differences, maybe due to cultural or sample variations.

We further suggest the adoption of the interview as a technique for collecting data in subsequent studies, as a means for obtaining more detailed information and reducing the possible effects of asking for written reports as well as some initial participants' resistance.

A more profound characterization of the sample would also be important to frame our understanding about the dilemmatic experiences described. In fact, teachers coming from different academic areas or teaching different disciplines may be confronted with distinct types of dilemmas or adopt different strategies to solve them. On the other hand, one's position in the school's hierarchy may also be a powerful source of differences concerning dilemmatic experiences – reports from participants in our study suggest that being in a higher hierarchical position may imply having higher responsibilities in ensuring the correct resolution of the moral dilemma.

The tendency for individuals to consider themselves more ethically conscientious than their peers may encourage the performance of non-ethical behaviours (Rego, Moreira & Sarrico, 2003). Acknowledging the existence of dilemmatic situations in professional contexts and exploring the processes individuals use to solve them represent important steps in an open attitude towards becoming an ethically responsible organization, namely in schools.

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Regras de justiça procedimental em dilemas morais no trabalho de professores

O presente estudo pretende contribuir para a compreensão da moralidade em contextos profissionais, ao investigar a sua relação com as percepções de justiça. 69 professores do ensino básico e secundário preencheram um questionário contendo perguntas abertas. A análise de conteúdo mostrou que a maioria dos participantes (75%) mencionou espontaneamente regras de justiça procedimental (Leventhal, 1980), sendo a regra de ética a mais frequentemente referida. Os dilemas mais referidos envolviam a reacção a transgressões (Wark & Krebs, 1996). Estes resultados são discutidos considerando a necessidade de organizações socialmente responsáveis e orientadas por princípios éticos reconhecerem as experiências morais e as percepções de justiça dos seus trabalhadores.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: dilemas morais; regras de justiça procedimental; ética docente.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the teachers who composed our sample and their schools' directions boards. The assistance of Carlos Ferreira Peralta, Klaus Helkama and Vincent Rogard is also thankfully recognized.