

Ethical Decision Making Styles in the Workplace: Relations to the Keirsey Temperament Sorter

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Abstract – To explicate Kinston’s seven-style ethical decision typology, relationships between styles and the Keirsey Temperament Sorter were examined. All three factors underlying the ethical styles were related in theoretically distinct ways to the character types identified by the Sorter. Overall, the ethical decision styles appear to be an elegant elaboration of the decision making (T-F) distinction within the Sorter.

Key Words – Ethics; decision; decision style; workplace; teleological; deontological; rationalist; experientialist; systemicist; transcendentalist; individualist; legitimist; extroversion; introversion; sensation; intuition; thinking; feeling; perceiving; judging; Keirsey Temperament Sorter; Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

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Introduction

In recent work[4], the authors empirically investigated the framework developed by Kinston[2] for reconciling the deontological-teleological controversy in decision-making. Specifically, the study examined the style preferences of 333 American college students using written managerial decision scenarios. Respondents used a ranking system to indicate the extent to which each of the four teleological (ends-focused) ethical decisions styles and three deontological (means-focused) decision styles described their own ethical orientation in each scenario. From the data, three bi-polar factors underlying the ethical decision styles emerged, indicating a simplified structure underlying Kinston’s scheme.

This brief article extends the earlier findings and discussion based on exploratory data that were collected at the same time and from the same respondents discussed above. These additional data reflect assessments of character type based on the Keirsey Temperament Sorter[1]. This is a 70-item alternate form of the somewhat longer Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[3] that is widely used for researching character and temperament types.

A short discussion of Kinston’s typology and the authors’ previous findings would be useful before discussing the current analysis. Kinston’s scheme consists of seven ethical approaches to decision making based on an individual’s sense of obligation and views of what is virtuous. Each approach has a distinct teleological or

deontological imperative. Furthermore, the seven types are believed to be mutually exclusive and relatively independent of situational contexts. The approaches and the underlying orientations are as follows:

Teleological (Ends-focused) Decision Styles:

- 1 *Rationalist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to meet concrete and self-evidently worthwhile objectives.
- 2 *Experientialist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to pursue emotionally desired values which can be easily applied.
- 3 *Systemicist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to balance all the consequences in relation to the values, needs, and interests of all concerned parties.
- 4 *Transcendentalist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to respond to a deep inner sense of what is right, good, eternal, and divine.

Deontological (Means-focused) Decision Styles:

- 1 *Conventionalist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to conform to widely accepted views of what is valued and proper.
- 2 *Individualist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to ensure one's own security and interests in light of existing power relationships.
- 3 *Legitivist* - Decisions are based on an obligation to set and adhere to formal policies or rules created and imposed by legitimate authority.

A principal components factor analysis of style preference rankings from the college sample, followed by a VARIMAX rotation, produced three bipolar factors anchored by Kinston's styles at the extremes. The Legitivist versus Experientialist factor (32% of total variance) appeared to reflect one's tendency to follow the rules or to break them in order to perhaps satisfy short-term desires. The Transcendentalist versus Individualist factor (19% of total variance) appeared to address the extent to which people respond to deeply-held moral imperatives as opposed to "answering to themselves" out of self-interest. The Conventionalist versus Systemicist factor (17% of total variance) appeared to differentiate between a preference to follow past precedent as to what is acceptable to others and a willingness to part with the past in order to arrive at decisions that others can accept. A fourth factor - composed exclusively of the Rationalist style - demonstrated very low consistency across the seven managerial decision scenarios. As a result, it was dropped from the factor model.

Extended Findings and Implications

The extended findings were obtained by computing correlations between each of the seven ethical decision styles and the four factors underlying the Keirseley Temperament Sorter[1]. These are Extroversion versus Introversion (E-I), Sensation versus Intuition (S-N), Thinking versus Feeling (T-F), and Perceiving versus Judging (P-J). Identical labels and meanings are employed in the full-length Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[3].

In essence, the E-I factor reflects the primary source of one's personal energy, whether it be based on the world of people and relationships (E) or the world of

things and ideas (I). The S-N distinction captures preferences for perceiving things by either strong reliance upon sensory (S) data or data resulting mostly from intuitive (N) means. The T-F factor identifies preferences for making judgements based on emotion or "gut feel" (F) versus rational, structured, "thinking" (T). Finally, the P-J factor indicates whether one's perceptual (P) processes (e.g., Sensation, Intuition) or judgment (J) processes (e.g., Feeling, Thinking) are likely to appear more dominant to others.

Only noteworthy or statistically significant relationships, using two-tailed significance tests, are discussed below. Naturally, causal inferences drawn from the correlational findings require a degree of caution. However, the data provoke a number of insights that appear to complement Kinston's framework as well as the logic behind the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

While the Rationalist style was not statistically related to any of the Keirsey types, each of the other six ethical styles - which together comprise the three bi-polar ethical decision factors - was indeed associated with one or more character types, as noted in Table 1. It is also noteworthy that the Extroversion versus Introversion factor in the Temperament Sorter was not found to be related to any of the ethical decision styles. This may suggest that the decision context, whether dominated by social, material or conceptual issues, may have little influence upon the decision-maker.

Table 1 Associations Between Ethical Decision Dimensions and the Keirsey Character Types

Teleological Ethical Decision Style	Associated Keirsey Character Type(s)	Opposing Deontological Ethical Decision Style	Associated Keirsey Character Type(s)
Experientialist	N ^{***} , F ^{***} , P ^{***}	Legitimet	S ^{***} , T ^{***} , J ^{***}
Transcendentalist	N ^{***} , F ^{***}	Individualist	S [*] , T [*]
Systemicist	F ^{**}	Conventionalist	T ^{**}

*** $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

* $p < .10$

Table 1 reveals the S, T, and J character orientations to each be more associated with means-focused rather than ends-focused decision making. In light of the deontological biases toward ethical conduct in modern bureaucratic organizations, together with population norms reported by Kiersey and Bates[1], these orientations could be expected to be more valued, selected for, and rewarded in the workplace than their respective N, F, and P complements. Specifically, S (practical, sensible, factual, down-to-earth) approaches, found in 75% of the population, are likely to be preferred over N (imaginative, speculative, future-oriented) approaches. Furthermore, T (objective, policy-focused, impersonal, standards-oriented) approaches found in traditionally male-dominated managerial ranks and in 60% of males are

generally preferred over F (subjective, personal, sympathetic) approaches. Additionally, it makes sense that J (decisive, planning-oriented, closure-seeking) orientations would generally be encouraged among managers more than P (flexible, wait and see, tentative) approaches. It is part of a manager's job to assess a given situation, plan and choose from appropriate courses of action, implement the course of action selected, and then move on to the next set of issues or tasks. Overall, the data suggest that S, T, and J biases among the managerial ranks of many organizations may discourage the non-routine, teleological approaches to decision-making that may be required in today's dynamic organizational environments.

Table 1 prompts another interesting observation. Apparently, as the specificity associated with describing one's character using the Temperament Sorter increases (i.e., NFP or STJ versus NF or ST versus F or T), so does the amount of variance accounted for by the associated ethical decision style factor. It is possible that the respondents reacted to this implied degree of specificity by, for instance, drawing larger cognitive distinctions between the Experientialist and Legitivist styles than between the Transcendentalist and Individualist or the Systemicist and Conventionalist Styles.

The Systemicist versus Conventionalist factor in Table 1 appears to be associated with the broadest difference in character types (F versus T). As noted earlier in the Temperament Sorter, the Feeling-Thinking dichotomy primarily reflects one's decision making style. The data suggest that Systemicists, in trying to account for the interests of all parties to a decision, may prefer to act out of a "gut feel" that personalized, democratic approaches to dealing with others are needed to promote harmony. Furthermore, Systemicists may very well be satisfied with subjective criteria for evaluating the extent to which different parties' interests are represented in a decision. On the other hand, the data hint that, in trying to adhere to tradition, Conventionalists may very well prefer impersonal, step-by-step, and rational approaches to decisions - even if time-consuming probing of past practices is required.

The Transcendentalist versus Individualist factor in Table 1 appears to reflect preference for the NF temperament versus its opposite, ST. The mere 12% of the general population occupying the NF category[1] supports Kinston and the authors' observations that relatively fewer individuals fall into the Transcendentalist category. Underlying the NF, according to Keirse and Bates, are hungers to establish unique identities, to attach meanings to one's actions, to become self-actualized, and to work toward a personal vision of perfection that lies in moral codes and imperatives. The N aspect of this temperament suggests that this vision may be largely derived intuitively while the F hints that the Transcendentalist may find it difficult to rationalize or justify decisions to others. At the other extreme of the same ethical decision factor, the S and T characteristics associated with being an Individualist suggest a preference for rational, step-by-step decision making in light of one's own security that would entail straightforward "sensible" action without over-analysis of possibilities or implications.

Experientialists, associated with N, F, and P in Table 1, appear to represent a possible refinement of the NF temperament just linked with Transcendentalists. The data hint that Experientialists may attach a relatively low personal value to conformity and a higher value to the kind of self-actualization that can be evidenced through positive emotional states. The addition of the P to the classic NF tempera-

ment perhaps reflects an open-mindedness and flexibility that may be valued by Experientialists in their relationships with others.

On the other hand, the data suggest that Legitimists, associated with S, T, and J, appeared to represent one kind of SJ temperament. According to Keirseey and Bates, SJ's often feel compelled to be bound and obligated, to stabilize situations, and to demonstrate loyalty and belonging. The addition of the T to the SJ temperament suggest an individual who may be likely to pursue this loyalty and belonging with a strategy or game plan, using systematic approaches to isolate the truly "legitimate" rules, policies, or procedures.

Conclusion

The current findings support the validity of Kinston's[2] framework and the structure of the three bi-polar factors reported in the authors' earlier study[4]. The sharp character-type contrasts between the teleological and deontological poles of each factor signify clear and distinct theoretical foundations. Overall, the three ethical decision factors appear to be an elegant elaboration of the decision making (T-F) distinction within the Myers Briggs Type Indicator[3]. The added intricacies are likely to provide a richness helpful to the scholarly discussion of choice, to the teaching of ethics, to management training, and to the design of organizational interventions. Continued research into relationships between ethical styles and other personality instruments may help to further explicate the decision factors.

References

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