

# Dual Process Ethical Decision-Making Models: Need for Empirical Examination

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**Abstract:** *The main purpose of the study is to examine various ethical decision-making models based on Dual Process Theory (DPT) and to determine the features of their application in business management. Systematization of the literary sources and approaches for solving the problem of managerial decision-making indicates that despite a significant number of data publications, the issue of the implementation and effectiveness of ethical models is poorly researched and requires a more detailed analysis. The object of research is secondary data contained in scientific articles published in journals. The paper examines the social-intuitive-emotional context of the ethical decision-making process, which can help understand the management context of these models. The results of the empirical analysis of the features of the use of the Social-Intuitionist (S-I), Cognitive-Intuitionist (C-I), and Cognitive-Affective models (C-A) models in the decision-making process proved the existence of significant differences between them. The methodological tools of the research were the theories of emotion and intuition, as they directly relate to the "Integrated Ethical Decision Making" (I-EDM) model, which is the most practiced in the actual business setting. The article proposes a conceptual integrated R-S-I-E Ethical Decision-Making model, which can be used in testing theoretical research questions and hypotheses related to business ethics. This model considers individual factors, personal moral philosophy (deontology, teleology), and the moral intensity managers feel during a moral dilemma. Based on the research results, the consequences of overcoming the gap between the existing theoretical developments on these issues and the peculiarities of the decision-making process in practice are summarized. The research results can be used in the empirical evaluation of ethical models in different cultural conditions (including India) and be helpful for the management of companies in making ethical decisions.*

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# Dual Process Ethical Decision-Making Models: Need for Empirical Examination

## Introduction

Academicians, economists, psychologists, and policymakers have examined ethical decision-making processes that led to the development of moral doctrines over time (Santosusso, 2016). In the business world, an ethical decision model (EDM) requires that ethical values be examined and incorporated into business processes. Schultz (1997) has defined decision-making as a cognitive process to evaluate an issue, establish objectives and goals, generate alternatives, and determine the outcomes of each choice. The understanding of the ethical problems and additional related information about ethical issues involved various stakeholders related to the decision-making process in organizations, hence included in various ethical decision-making models (EDM models). Several scholars (Forrester-Miller & Davis, 2016; Remley & Herlihy, 2010) have identified commonalities in various EDM models:

- Identifying and characterizing the problem.
- Determining the nature and dimension of the ethical dilemma.
- Identifying desired outcomes.
- Considering the possible outcomes of all alternatives.
- Selecting a set of actions.
- Assessing the chosen course of action.
- Choosing and implementing a plan of action.

In the last two decades, the literature related to the field of EDM has extended from philosophy to diverse fields of study, including clinical psychology, medicine, sociology, behavioral economics, and management (Cottone et al., 2000; Burkholder et al., 2020). In such a background, an attempt has been made to highlight the specific area of study related to social-intuition-emotions attributes of ethical decision-making. Several writers have conclusively established evaluation criteria for EDM models (Bartlett, 2003; Kelly & Elm, 2003; Whittier et al., 2006). Perhaps Loe et al. (2000) have delineated the most exhaustive synthesis of rational EDM models to date but in the last two decades, various non-rational ethical decision models have evolved in business ethics.

In his review of the existing EDM models, Bartlett (2003) contends that the contemporary literature in corporate ethics is mainly concerned with the philosophical theory and considers an “under socialized” view, thereby, overlooking the social context of ethics. He further suggests that models must focus on “real-life” situations or contexts in which the actual decision-making occurs. However, Kelly and Elm (2003), while offering the key elements and insights on principles by which a model can be ascertained, focused on organizational factors. These authors argued that organizational characteristics and environment significantly influence the moral intensity of the decision-makers' ethical considerations and affect the decision maker's experience of the ethical issues. In an empirical investigation of such a proposed model, Yu (2014) found that moral intensities result from subjective judgments affected by organizational circumstances instead of an objective notion. He suggested that subsequent studies explore ethical decision-making to determine whether EDM varies among cultures. In a similar attempt, Whittier et al. (2006) explore numerous ethical models in the literature to develop evaluative criteria applicable to prescriptive models. The authors demonstrated the value of comprehensive evaluation, articulated the operational judgment component and evaluated the utility in the real-world ethical decision-making models. However, intuition and human emotions play a universal role irrespective of the cultural setting and in the era of globalization, more relatable key elements need to be included in the EDM models.

The paper is structured in the following way. After the introduction, the next section discusses the development of the rational ethical decision-making process and dual-process theory influencing the process as identified in business ethics. The third section discusses the development of ethical decision models based on Dual Process Theory in the last two decades, and in the last section, we discuss the applicability of these models in business organizations and propose future areas for research with concluding remarks.

## Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to examine the various EDMs based on Dual Process Theory (DPT) available in the previous studies and analyze the effectiveness of these models, specifically in business management. This paper aims to assist management researchers in adopting an integrated approach and empirically examine newer evolved models of ethical decision-making.

## Research Methodology

**Data and Material.** This study focuses on exploring various ethical decision-making models based on Dual Process Theory. This study has a descriptive research design. This study uses secondary data, which is collected from published research articles in journals. These articles are collected from JSTOR, Springer, Sage, National Digital Library. This study takes a two-decade period for the theoretical foundation explanation. This study chooses ethical decision-making models, which fills the research gap found in previous studies.

## Discussion

**Transition from Reasoning to Dual Process Theory.** The importance of reasoning in decision-making is emphasized in rational models. The reasoning process includes a sequence of steps from which deductions and generalizations may be drawn from a specified data set to improve decision-making. In the organizational context, Simon (1979) contends the importance of reasoning and a series of steps used in rational decision-making models. The process requires (1) identification of the problem by the decision-maker, (2) development of various alternative actions keeping in consideration the competencies of the organization, (3) evaluate each alternative based on likely consequences, and (4) choosing an action that offers the best solution.

**Rational Models of General Decision-Making.** Rational models of EDM highlight the importance of reasoning as a process of concluding a given set of information to optimize the process of decision-making. Based on rational assumptions about the decision-maker, Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive moral development (CMD) model established the role of reasoning in the EDM process. Individuals make various suppositions at various levels of CMD for which a combination of a priori rules or principles related to morality is used to overcome an ethical issue. Rest's EDM model (1986) states that four components have guided moral action in organizational ethics: moral awareness (acknowledging a moral issue), judgment (justification of moral issue), intention (determining to act), and (iv) action (moral act). Several models of ethical decision-making based on moral judgment have been recommended in the academic literature (Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Trevino, 1986). According to Ferrell and Gresham (1985), moral evaluation arises during the individual's cognitive phase of development. Another more extensive interactionist model of EDM in organizations related to various individual and situational variables used to assess individuals' ethical decision-making behavior was proposed by Trevino (1986). The issue contingent model of Jones (1991) elucidates that ethical judgments result from an interaction of the decision maker's attributes with the situational factors, such as distinctive features of the ethical issue.

An extensive meta-analysis by Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) examined three decades of research related to the causes of unethical intentions and unethical behavior at work. Individual, moral issue, and organizational factors were identified as antecedents in the study, and it found the impact of individual, moral issues, and organizational factors on unethical behavior in the workplace. This discussion demonstrates that ethical decision-making is a complex process, and not simply a matter of selecting between predetermined alternatives. In support of the literature on ethical decision-making beyond reasoning, Haines et al. (2008) discussed the relevance of the perceived relevance of an ethical issue and empirically established the influence of perception on moral judgment in the context of these scenarios. An empirical study concluded that the intent to act morally is influenced by the magnitude of consequences (Chia & Lim, 2000). Such results highlight the gap between moral judgment and rationality in the context; further research is needed to identify all essential constructs related to such ethical decision-making. The Rationalist perspective of moral reasoning fails to address intuitions and emotions as important cognitive elements in the human being's decision process.

**Dual Process Theory (DPT) in Ethical Decision-Making Models.** Modern literature in psychology has argued that rationality is the central element of ethical decision-making (Zollo et al., 2016). Dual process theories in cognition have also impacted generalized decision-making models, which propose that cognitive

activities such as decision-making are two fundamentally distinct types of processing. According to Cushman et al. (2006), people make moral judgments by cognitive reasoning based on the premises they categorize in moral justifications. Dual Process Theory (DPT) is a theory of two distinct kinds of moral reasoning, i.e., cognitive subsystems, which is an emerging field of research in ethics related to moral judgment. Kahneman D. (2003) identified intuition and reasoning as dual processing modes. Intuition (or System 1) was found to be quick and automatic, driven by emotions as part of the reasoning process, resulting in intuitive behaviors and judgments. Intuition works as an “automatic” process that is a combination of four components: awareness, intention, efficiency, and control. Reasoning (or System 2) involves rule-based sequential thinking, cognitive capacity, and reasons according to logical standards.

Greene (2001; 2013) stated the dual-process model, which asserts that moral judgment is an outcome of the conscious reasoning process and intuitive/emotional processes. The experimental studies conducted by Greene et al. (2001) using functional magnetic resonance imaging showed the relationship between emotional engagement on moral judgment while deliberating on personal experiences. They conducted psychological research to suggest that there are heightened levels of arousal in the emotional centers of the brain for various moral dilemmas (“personal” versus “impersonal”) difficulties and non-moral dilemmas. As Greene (2001) further explains, the moral judgment process consists of two distinct moral philosophies: one is deontological evaluation concerns for rights and duties (guided by the intuitive, emotional process) and consequential evaluation concerns for promoting the greater good (controlled by moral reasoning cognitive process).

**Social-Intuitionist (S-I) Model of EDM.** Haidt (2001) describes the theoretical model of decision-making and depicts the way individuals consider moral decisions and moral judgments based on intuitions. According to him, moral reasoning is a mental activity where moral judgments (like good-bad, like-dislike) happen without cognitive activity. The social-intuitionist model, as described by Jonathan Haidt (2001), discusses the relevance of intuitive decisions and the socio-cultural role of moral judgments. Furthermore, complex moral issues mediate the interaction between situational perception and information processing resulting in moral judgment and its post-hoc justification. Haidt (2001) proposed six-step sequential processes leading to the individual’s moral judgments:

- Judgments related to the intuition and perceptive assessment of situations and persons are based on associative coping processes and internalization of our environment is based on successful heuristics (Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman, 2002).
- The post-hoc justification happens when an individual provides reasons for behaviour or judgment following an intuitive assessment of an issue. Kuhn (1991).
- Moral reasoning is influenced by the post-hoc justification of intuitions.
- The social influence is reflected on convictions developed as our intuitions, also known as “social persuasions”.
- The reflective judgment emerges as a consequence of reflective thought, regardless of whether it is consistent with our intuitions and fosters the development of the decision-making capabilities.
- The inner conversation regarding situations and other people's points of view give rise to intuitive judgments. Such reflections also help to understand others’ perspectives and result in the emergence of additional intuitions.

The S-I model of moral judgment stresses that our intuitive beliefs and concepts result in intuitive judgments since human beings generally process information unconsciously. Moreover, social norms and values are internalized by individuals and influence social dimensions of judgment. The theoretical proposition was supported by lab experiments using vignettes related to taboo violations and the respondents were asked to evaluate the ethicality of behaviour. Critics of the S-I model of moral judgment highlight the proposition of reasoning in making ethical decisions and question the post hoc proposition of moral sense (Blasi, 2009). However, rational models of ethical decision-making had not considered intuition as an influencing factor on reasoning in the decision-making process. Moreover, Mackenzie (2012) raises concerns about the lab experiment design to generalize the results in moral psychology.

**Cognitive-Intuitionist (C-I) Model of EDM.** Dedeke (2013) proposed a cognitive-intuitive view of the moral judgment model based on neurocognitive and social-intuitionist fields of inquiry. The framing of an issue, pre-processing of cognitive (automatic and emotional) progressions, moral assessment, moral deliberation, and intent are incorporated in this model, which is premised on five different functional and interdependent processes. The framing of an issue initiates instinctive reasoning and emotions (affect and feelings). Individuals are engaged in the pre-processing of stimuli before making moral judgments. The resultant reflexive judgment undergoes the process of moral reasoning in the mind and moral intent. It explains how moral intent development is influenced by an individual's emotional regulation process, perception towards moral intensity, and ethical organisational climate perspective.

**Cognitive-Affective Model of EDM.** Recent approaches have acknowledged the significant advances that emotions have made to decision-making overall and morality and ethical considerations. Unlike the traditional assumption that emotional reactions are purely reflexive, Pizarro (2000), in psychological research, put forward the theory that the moral views of individuals impact the occurrence of moral emotions. He believes that emotions facilitate moral discussions and judgments about what is right and wrong. He further contends that emotions like empathy at the workplace generate sensitivity among employees since they function as a stimulus in EDM while identifying a moral issue. Organizational success measured in terms of commitment and motivation of employees is achieved by positive emotions (Habib et al., 2014). Over the years, research results have indicated that ethical decisions made by an individual are affected by varied emotions, such as task-related emotions affecting ethical judgments (Agnihotri et al., 2012; Garg et al., 2005). On the other side, negative emotions, such as inefficiency, fraud, dysfunctional conduct, and antisocial inclinations, contributed to company failure (Van Kleef, 2014).

Perhaps, for the first time, the integration of emotion in the rational ethical decision process has been addressed in Gaudine and Thorne (2001) C-A model of EDM. The pioneers developed a positive, theoretical EDM model that incorporated emotions and demonstrated the influence of emotions on an individual's ethical decision-making. This cognitive-developmental model offers a step-by-step process to include emotions as self-awareness during decision making and make better ethical decisions. According to the authors, arousal and emotional states are two distinct elements of emotion that impact the way ethical decisions are made. As an emotion, the degree of arousal is assessed, varying from calm to aroused. The feeling state includes a range of emotions, from positive effects such as joy to negative effects such as fear. The model demonstrates how the two feeling states affect various components of Rest's (1983) Model of Moral Action, consisting of ethical sensitivity, ethical decision choice, ethical motivation, ethical character, and ethical behavior. It is essential to remember that every circumstance is unique and that an individual's emotional reaction varies depending on the circumstances. As a result, the solutions to complex problems are rarely the same. However, the authors have not empirically tested the propositions, and the specific impact of their making ethical decisions cannot be measured.

**Role of Emotion in EDM.** The decision maker's emotions or "other side" of ethical decision-making has been examined by Vitell et al. (2013) and proposed a theoretical model and testable research propositions. They provided the moderating effects of self-control in the model, which is a decision-maker's ability to manage and regulate impulses, emotions, and wants. It further generates moral action and moral courage through directing the effects of moral potency along with morality ownership and moral efficacy. The authors have suggested various testable propositions:

- There is an interaction between ethical judgements, intentions, and actions with emotions. (Gaudine & Thorne, 2001; Agnihotri et al., 2012).
- One's behaviors are influenced by one's interactions with the environment. Lazarus (1991). This interaction creates emotions influencing ethical judgment, intentions, and behaviors.
- Moral potency, which is influenced by one's emotions, has a consequence on individual's behavioral intentions and actions (De Sousa, 2001).
- Self-control has been shown to moderate the associations amid emotions, ethical judgment, behavioral intentions, and even actions. Self-control and moral potency have moderating effects on ethical judgments, intentions, and actions, thereby explaining the function of emotions in ethical decision-making.

Traditional negative valence emotions such as fear, power, and excitement have been examined by Yacout and Vitell (2018) on ethical perceptions and intentions. Vitell et al. (2013) observed that the impact of positive emotions such as empathy and happiness needs to be empirically tested in the context of ethical

decision models. The authors have suggested empirical research in consumer decision-making and organizational decision-making realms using emotional constructs as a potential complement to existing cognitive models. Xie et al. (2019) empirically tested the impact of cognitive evaluations and emotional processes on consumer response towards corporate social responsibility. The insights need to be further developed for the development of constructs to measure the framing of the moral issue, the identification of emotions, and moral judgment to predict moral intent. The future possibility for business ethics researchers is to access instruments for capturing automatic brain functioning from the areas of psychology and neurology.

### **Proposed Integrated R-S-I-E Ethical Decision-Making Conceptual Framework**

Schwartz (2016) proposed an integrative “Integrated Ethical Decision-Making” (or I-EDM) model based on two crucial aspects: the EDM process and the factors that influence EDM. The rationalist moral process is based on Rest’s (1984) four-component model consisting of awareness, rational judgment, ethical intention, and behavior. According to Trevino (1986), both individual (moral capacity) and situational (organizational, issue, personal) factors have an impact on the EDM process. This model suggests that moral judgment and intention are directly affected by emotion (feelings) and intuition (sense), along with the reason (reflection), rationalization (reasoning), and consultation (confirm) result in judgment and intention due to the interplay of numerous distinct processes.

We propose a conceptual integrated R-S-I-E Ethical Decision-Making model, as shown in Fig.1, to conduct an empirical study for testing research questions and hypotheses. This framework includes individual factors, personal moral philosophy (deontology, teleology), and moral intensity perceived in the moral dilemma. It has the decision-making framework developed by Rest (1986), which consists of moral stages, including issue framing, rational judgment, moral reasoning, and ethical intention to behave. The situational context affects how an individual perceives the moral issue (Rhim et al., 2021). Following Dedek’s Cognitive-Intuitionist Model (2015) and based on various rational decision models, deontology and teleology influence the perception of the moral issue in the moral dilemma (Vitell et al., 1993). Moreover, the role of moral intuition (Haidt, 2001) and moral emotion (Gaudine and Thorne, 2001) explains that the moral reasoning process is affected by non-conscious cognitive processes. This model integrates the influence of moral intuition and moral emotion that affect ethical intention to behave in the moral judgment process. The evaluation of the consequences of actions occurs during the moral reflection process and impacts ethical behavior along with rational and intuitive moral judgment (Rhim et al., 2021).

The integrated model (R-S-I-E) of ethical decision-making proposes the influence of rational(R) moral decision-making process, situational (S) context along with intuitive (I) and emotional (E) moral judgment to explain the DPT in resolving business ethics dilemmas. In a recent study, an integrative EDM was applied by (Rhim et al., 2021) to predict autonomous vehicles' moral behaviors from users' perspectives and establish the “context” link of ethical decisions between eastern and western cultures. They have tested various propositions between the individual factors and personal moral philosophy using a dual-process theory. The empirical work on the integrative framework recognizes the importance and existence of emotion-intuition-cognitive influence of ethical behaviours in organizations.



Fig 1. R-S-I-E Ethical Decision-Making Framework

Source: Compiled by the authors

### Conclusion

A better understanding of the various antecedents influencing ethical behavior in the workplace is important for organizational practitioners and business ethics researchers. These models provide a theoretical basis and practical justification for the applicability of moral intent and emotions in EDM. The purpose is to offer specific solutions to ethical dilemmas and relevant strategies to improve problem-solving in organizations. Roberts (2015) explores and assesses the effects of organizational culture and moral imagination on decision-making processes in general and ethical decision-making. Under the discussed theoretical framework, such studies have relevance for employee training. Similar kinds of studies can be conducted with larger sample sizes and/or replicated in a different cultural setting to test the reliability of the above-discussed models. In organizations, it provides favorable conditions for enhancing creative problem-solving skills for employees to improve ethical decision-making.

Recent research on organizational climate establishes the role of environment effectiveness on employee work-life (Schneider & Barbera, 2014; Zohar & Hofmann, 2012; Rozman & Strukelj, 2021). In an ethical organizational culture, acceptable behavioral norms establish the desirable values, ethical standards, and employee actions within an organization. Such ethical norms help design formal structures (such as a code of ethics), rewards, and incentive systems to promote ethical behavior and leadership in an organization. The theoretical models discussed in this paper can be employed in business ethics to analyze how dual-process theory is related to the process of ethical decision-making. There is extensive research on testing the idea that ethical decision-making models result in higher ethical decisions.

### Future Approach of the Study

The future approach for research inquiry is to apply integrated decision models in the context of organizational settings. Jangsiriwattana et al. (2018) integrated the seven rationalist-based ethical decision-making models with Buddhist philosophy and then formulated an EDM for the Thai context. The researchers recommend the development of a culture-based ethical-decision making model that should also be tested in other Asian countries. Another future direction for empirical work is proposed by Zollo et al. (2016), an integrated framework of ethical decision-making model based on moral intuition and a rationalist approach. The authors suggest applying the model in a managerial context based on the concept of

*synderesis*, an inherent human habit based on virtue ethics as a precursor to the moral judgement and ethical decision-making process. Evidence can be generated for future research using the scenario-based approach to know participants' ethical intentions and behavior. For an ethical dilemma, the experimental group can be given a specific model of how to make an ethical decision, while the control group does not get this model. The empirical results will help generalize the ethical decision models for organizational settings.

The future study can be undertaken in the Indian context using a heterogeneous sample of managers working in various sectors and at different positions. Additionally, mediating variables of the association identified amongst various components of an integrative model of the EDM process may be included in the further empirical study.

### Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations, primarily due to theoretical assumptions on the precedents of numerous steps in making ethical decisions. However, it provides a theoretical framework to empirically test various antecedents like socio-intuition (Haidt, 2001; Schwartz, 2016) in an organizational context. Furthermore, adequate attention has not been addressed to offering testable propositions and solutions to specific ethical dilemmas and relevant strategies to improve problem-solving in organizations. In practical application, the results from (Whitaker & Godwin, 2013) reveal that individuals who recognize moral components in day-to-day lives are prone to find moral concerns in a specific scenario. The findings establish the positive influence of moral attentiveness on one's moral imagination.

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