

The Legacy Motive: A Catalyst for Sustainable Decision Making in Organizations

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ABSTRACT: In this article, we review and build on intergenerational and behavioral ethics research to consider how the motive to build a lasting legacy can impact ethical behavior in intergenerational decision making. We discuss how people can utilize their relationships to organizations to craft their legacies. Further, we elucidate how the legacy motive can enhance business ethics, incorporating theory and empirical findings from research on intergenerational decision making, generativity, and terror management theory to develop the legacy construct and to outline the psychological underpinnings of motivations to leave a positive legacy. We discuss the ways in which legacies can provide a link between life-meaning and pro-social motivation, and we consider the ways in which individuals' social environments can moderate the intensity of the legacy motive and can impact legacy-building behavior by determining the types of legacies that are valued. Finally, we highlight the implications of these ideas for ethical behavior and sustainable decision making in business contexts.

All of the philanthropy you see—the buildings named after people for giving \$50 million to this museum or to Columbia [University]—is a result of one man after another trying to conquer his mortality. (Konigsberg, 2008)

THIS RATHER STRONG STATEMENT is attributed to Dr. T. Byram Karasu, a psychoanalyst to Wall Street financiers and other wealthy individuals, who was interviewed in the *New York Times* in the summer of 2008 to discuss his experience of treating narcissistic disorders in wealthy patients. It highlights two important points for understanding the psychology of leaving a legacy. First, individuals' awareness of their own mortality can produce feelings of anxiety that motivate efforts to extend the self into the future. Second, even individuals so obsessed with themselves that they require psychological evaluation and treatment will make sacrifices in the present to provide benefits to others in the future. We define a legacy as an enduring meaning attached to one's identity and manifested in the impact that one has on others beyond the temporal constraints of the lifespan. When an individual leaves a legacy, that individual has established an impact that lasts beyond his or her living existence on this planet. In this way, legacies are vehicles that extend one's identity and one's life's work and meaning into the future to outlive the physical self. In business contexts, legacy-building, or behavior designed to craft one's impact on future generations, often takes the form of working to ensure the long-term viability of an organization, leaving the organization stronger, more productive, and more deeply connected to the shared values of the group's stakeholders than one found

it. It can also take an instrumental form, in which the resources and capabilities of the organization are used to create a lasting impact on one's community or other groups with which one identifies in a deeply meaningful way.

In this article, we build upon research on intergenerational decision making, as well as research on terror management theory and generativity theory, to articulate the psychological dynamics underlying the motive to build a positive legacy, and we explore the role those dynamics play in promoting ethical behavior, especially in business and organizational contexts. We argue that the motivation to leave a positive legacy is rooted in a fundamental desire to feel that one's life has meaning, and that various aspects of one's social context can impact the legacy motive either by enhancing the fundamental desire for meaning or by defining the types of meanings that are culturally and personally valued.

We begin by examining previous research that can illuminate the psychological dynamics that are involved when considering intergenerational behavior, which is behavior that affects future others. We move on to explain the legacy concept and to discuss the ways in which legacies can provide a link between life-meaning and pro-social motivation. We then discuss the role of social context in moderating the extent of the legacy motive and the content of the legacies that individuals are inclined to pursue. Finally, we point to areas for future research that can extend the utility of the legacy concept for understanding and motivating ethical decision making in organizations and society.

INTERGENERATIONAL DECISION MAKING

Intergenerational decisions, which involve a person or group in the present making decisions that impact other individuals in the future, have been studied by scholars in a variety of disciplines. For example, legal scholars and philosophers theorize about the extent to which present actors are morally obligated to protect the interests of future others (e.g., Barry, 1989; Richards, 1981; Weiss, 1989), and economists seek to determine the balance between the interests of present decision makers and future others that can produce optimal levels of efficiency (e.g., Kotlikoff, 1992; Portney & Weyant, 1999). In contrast to these normative approaches, psychological research on intergenerational decision making takes a descriptive approach and focuses on the psychological factors that affect the actual decision making behavior of present actors.

A key feature of intergenerational decisions that is often a focus for psychological research is that the interests of present decision makers and the future others who will be impacted by their decisions may be in conflict. For example, preserving benefits for future generations may require that the present generation forego some of those benefits, while avoiding the imposition of burdens on future others may require that individuals in the present manage those burdens themselves. When this conflict between the interests of present and future actors exists, the present actors are faced with an intergenerational dilemma as they make decisions involving allocations of resources between generations (Wade-Benzoni, 2002a; 2008; [Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009](#)).

The previous psychological research on intergenerational dilemmas that we review in this article has been characterized by two primary boundary conditions (see [Tost, Hernandez, & Wade-Benzoni, 2008](#), for a detailed discussion). First, the present generation has complete and unilateral decision-making power; future others who will be impacted by the decision have no voice in the decision process or outcome. Second, social actors are removed from the social exchange context over time by death, retirement, or some other symbolic detachment from the group; consequently, they do not experience any future benefits or suffer the later consequences of their prior decisions. Thus, in this line of research, there is no opportunity for future generations to directly reciprocate the benefits or burdens given to them by prior generations. The simultaneous presence of these features helps to differentiate the psychology of intergenerational decisions from more typical inter-group situations in which other parties have their own voice, and from traditional social dilemmas in which the decision maker remains part of the collective over time and thus experiences, along with other group members, the consequences that emerge from his or her prior decisions ([Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009](#)).

A central goal of research on intergenerational dilemmas has been to identify the factors that influence the extent to which members of present generations are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest for the benefit of future others in the absence of economic or material incentives for them to do so. Key to this endeavor is the recognition that intergenerational dilemmas are characterized by a combination of interpersonal and intertemporal dimensions: decisions made by actors in the present affect other people (i.e., interpersonal) in the future (i.e., intertemporal). Below we review previous research relevant to decision making along these two dimensions and incorporate research on ethical decision making in order to highlight the psychological barriers to intergenerational beneficence. An understanding of these barriers is important because it can help us to understand when and how individuals are able to overcome them.

Two Dimensions of Intergenerational Decisions

The intertemporal dimension of intergenerational decisions produces a form of psychological distance between the decision maker and those who experience the repercussions of the decision. Psychologically distant concepts and events are those that are not aspects of an individual's immediate experience of reality ([Liberian, Trope, & Stephan, 2007](#)). When there is a time delay between a decision and its consequences, those consequences lack a sense of immediacy. An important finding from the research on intertemporal individual choice (i.e., decisions in which individuals choose between a benefit for the self now and a benefit for the self later) is that individuals tend to engage in time discounting. Time delay between decisions and consequences leads individuals to discount the value of those consequences (e.g., [Frederick, Loewenstein, & O'Donoghue, 2002](#); [Loewenstein, 1992](#)). Specifically, people discount the value of commodities that they will consume in the future, demonstrating a strong preference for immediate rather than postponed satisfaction, and greater temporal distance exacerbates this tendency. Just as individuals discount

the value of future outcomes to themselves, they also discount the value of future outcomes to others (Wade-Benzoni, 2008).

Moreover, the effects of intertemporal distance in intergenerational decisions are compounded by interpersonal distance. When making tradeoffs between the well-being of oneself and that of others, there is a tension between self-interest and the desire to benefit others. People may want to work towards ensuring the well-being of other people, but the consequences to the self feel more immediate and powerful than the consequences for others. For example, individuals favor their own direct interest over others when assigning wages (Messick & Sentis, 1983), determining legal settlements (Babcock, Loewenstein, Issacharoff, & Camerer, 1995; Loewenstein, Issacharoff, Camerer, & Babcock, 1993), and distributing bonuses (Diekmann, Samuels, Ross, & Bazerman, 1997), as well as favoring their indirect interest over their fiduciary responsibilities when functioning as accountants working on behalf of a client (Bazerman, Loewenstein, & Moore, 2002). Interpersonal psychological distance, which can be great or small, refers to the extent to which an individual experiences a connection with or affinity for another individual or a collective entity (Hernandez, Chen, & Wade-Benzoni, 2006). When interpersonal psychological distance is great, individuals tend to place less weight on the consequences of their decisions for others relative to the weight they place on the consequences to themselves (e.g., Loewenstein, 1996; Loewenstein, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989). Most intergenerational decisions involve high levels of interpersonal distance. In some cases, the particular persons who will experience the future repercussions may be impossible to identify (e.g., future organizational leaders who may not have joined the organization yet) or may even be yet to be born (e.g., future generations of citizens who will deal with the repercussions of global climate change over the next several centuries). As the interpersonal distance that characterizes an intergenerational dilemma increases, so does the tendency to discount the value of outcomes to future others (Wade-Benzoni, 2008).

In sum, in intergenerational decisions, there is both intertemporal and interpersonal distance between the present decision maker and the future others who will be affected by the decision. Thus, future others are doubly removed from the decision maker's immediate experience due to the combination of the two types of distance. The combined effect of these two types of distance leads to intergenerational discounting, or the tendency to discount the value of benefits and the harm of burdens left to future others (Wade-Benzoni, 2002a, 2008). Indeed, previous research indicates that individuals engage in intergenerational discounting and that enhanced distance on either dimension increases the extent of the intergenerational discounting (Wade-Benzoni, 2008). Researchers on psychological distance (Lieberman et al. 2007) propose that when individuals experience psychological distance in one domain, they tend to extend that distance to other domains, and empirical research suggests that affinity and intertemporal distance interact, such that the effect of each is greater when the other one is low (Wade-Benzoni, 2008), although additional research is needed to establish how these effects might interact with other factors that influence intergenerational beneficence (Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009).

The psychological distance that characterizes intergenerational decisions has important implications for how decisions are approached in business and economic contexts. For example, consider the recent housing crisis. Borrowers overstated their income and were encouraged by mortgage brokers, who were rewarded for the size and quantity of loans regardless of the likelihood that they would be repaid. Appraisers, who received more business if homes were appraised above loan-to-value thresholds, facilitated these behaviors. Most of these parties could have foreseen the negative future consequences of their actions, but they failed to place a sufficient value on those distant costs (which, to the extent that they were aware of them, they expected to accrue mostly to individuals other than themselves) in the face of the present personal benefits.

Egocentrism and Ethical Decision Making

If the research on intertemporal discounting and preference for the self in self-other tradeoffs indicates that the prospects for intergenerational beneficence are bleak, research on bounded rationality and egocentric biases from the ethical decision making literature provide further reason to doubt the likelihood of intergenerationally-beneficent behavior. These areas of research have focused on the nonconscious aspects of the ethical decision making process. Bounded rationality describes how individuals often rely on automatic responses to ethical decisions, and that in doing so, individuals' implicit preferences can produce biases in their decisions. Research in this area has demonstrated that individuals often engage in automatic stereotyping ([Banaji & Bhaskar, 2000](#)), self-serving behavior on the part of fiduciaries ([Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh, 2003](#); [Chugh, Bazerman & Banaji, 2005](#)), and unethical behavior in negotiations ([Kern & Chugh, 2009](#)). According to this research, people behave this way, not as a result of a calculated gamble that they will not be caught or that the punishment will be small, nor out of a callous disregard for their impact on others; instead, people tend to exhibit these behaviors because the context in which they are given information causes them to process information automatically, in a way that is nonconscious and beyond their control.

This area of research is consistent with Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model of moral reasoning, which holds that ethical and moral decision making is primarily an intuitive process, with effortful and conscious reflection on moral or ethical issues serving the purpose, not of improving the rationality or ethicality of the decision, but instead of justifying whatever action was indicated by an immediate affective reaction. In this way, individuals behave, not as intuitive scientists seeking truth, but as intuitive lawyers seeking vindication ([Baumeister & Newman, 1994](#); [Kramer & Messick, 1996](#)). Taking the bounded ethicality and social intuitionist models of ethical decision making research together, a picture emerges in which individuals frequently have an automatic and intuitive affective reaction favoring their own material self-interest over any ethical or prosocial outcome, and then they search for a rationalization to justify the self-interested behavior.

The research on egocentric interpretations of fairness provides an excellent example of this dynamic. Extensive research has demonstrated that when the interests

of two individuals or groups are opposed, individuals who are personally involved in the situation exhibit biased perceptions of fairness ([Babcock, et al., 1995](#); [Bazerman & Neale, 1982](#); [Neale & Bazerman, 1983](#); [Wade-Benzoni, Tenbrunsel, & Bazerman, 1996](#); [Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978](#)). Specifically, individuals' fairness assessments of the various potential outcomes of a given dilemma tend to indicate that they view their preferred outcome as also the most fair and just outcome. This type of bias emerges as a result of dual motivations on the part of the individual. On the one hand, the individual is motivated to present a positive image of the self as a fair-minded, generous, and ethical person. On the other hand, the individual is also motivated to pursue his or her own self-interest by obtaining benefits and avoiding burdens. According to the social intuitionist model ([Haidt, 2001](#)) and the bounded ethicality view ([Banaji et al., 2003](#)), these biased judgments of fairness are the result of the individual's initial intuitive preference for the self-interested option, followed by a reflective defense of that option, in which the individual searches for objective grounds upon which to stake a claim for the fairness of the self-interested outcome. Indeed, research has indicated that in making such judgments, individuals do not realize that their judgments are skewed by a self-serving bias; furthermore, this effect has been demonstrated to generalize across cultures ([Wade-Benzoni, Okumura, Brett, Moore, Tenbrunsel, & Bazerman, 2002](#)).

Ethical decision making research also suggests that there are at least two factors that are likely to exacerbate these egocentric tendencies in intergenerational contexts. First, research has demonstrated that individuals are likely to ignore their impact on others unless the decision framework reaches a level of moral intensity that allows them to recognize a moral issue ([Flannery & May, 2000](#); [Jones, 1991](#); [Morris & McDonald, 1994](#); [Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Frank, 1999](#)). Intergenerational conflicts are characterized by a low moral intensity, as they can involve diffuse concentrations of effect (affecting large numbers of people), low proximity (those affected are unknown to the decision maker), low temporal immediacy (due to the intertemporal distance that separates intergenerational decisions and consequences), and unknown magnitude and likelihood of effect. Thus, the low level of moral intensity that characterizes intergenerational decisions would be expected to impede intergenerational beneficence by minimizing the salience of the moral issue ([Kim, Diekmann, & Tenbrunsel, 2003](#)).

Second, the ambiguity of outcomes and attributions associated with intergenerational dilemmas provides ample opportunity for "strategic ignorance," wherein people find ways to remain blind to the knowable negative effects their actions have on others ([Dana, Weber, & Kuang, 2007](#)) or to cheat while maintaining a positive self concept ([Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008](#)). Returning to the example of the housing crisis, the egocentric short-term focus of many of the actors was exacerbated by the fact that the future costs, though apparent in retrospect, were ambiguous in terms of the extent of the exact cost to the parties involved, the extent of risk to third parties, the total number of defaults, or the likelihood of any particular customer defaulting. This ambiguity allowed individuals to pursue a strategic ignorance to the dangers their decisions posed for both themselves as individuals and for society as a whole.

Indeed, recent research in intergenerational decision making has demonstrated the existence and persistence of egocentric biases in intergenerational contexts. Specifically, findings indicate that individuals judge lower allocations to future generations as more fair when they are part of the current generation of decision makers than when they are part of the future generation who experiences the consequences of those decisions ([Wade-Benzoni, Hernandez, Medvec, & Messick, 2008](#)). Thus, members of present generations have been shown to demonstrate egocentric biases (in comparison to neutral third-party judges), and these biases in turn produce a tendency to act in favor of the self and against the interests of future others ([Wade-Benzoni et al., 2008](#)).

In sum, a review of research on self-other trade-offs, intertemporal individual choice, and egocentrism in ethical decision making suggests that the combination of interpersonal and intertemporal distance that characterizes intergenerational decisions minimizes the prospects for intergenerational beneficence. We explain below, however, that it is precisely this same combination of interpersonal and intertemporal distance that makes it possible for decision makers to leave a legacy. Therefore, we argue that when individuals are motivated to leave a legacy, these dimensions of distance may in fact increase, rather than decrease, the likelihood of intergenerationally-beneficent behavior.

LEGACIES

A legacy is an enduring meaning attached to one's identity and manifested in the impact that one has on others beyond the temporal constraints of the lifespan. Legacies are intergenerational phenomena, characterized by both intertemporal and interpersonal dimensions. When an individual leaves a legacy, that individual has established an impact that will persist into the future and have an effect on other individuals in some way.

The legacy concept is highly related to the concept of generativity. [Erikson \(1963\)](#) proposed generativity as a life stage that was the next natural step in human development after the resolution of early adulthood conflicts. In Erikson's (1963) model, once an individual has developed a personal sense of identity by psychologically establishing who they are in relation to their communities and the other important people in their lives, they begin to pursue actions that benefit those communities and relationships and that promote their continuity across generations. Generativity is understood by contemporary scholars as a constellation of thoughts, motivations, and behaviors that combine to produce an investment of one's substance in forms of life and work that will impact and guide future generations ([Kotre, 1984](#); [McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992](#)), and it has been demonstrated to predict a variety of prosocial behaviors ([Rossi, 2001](#)).

Building on this view of generativity, we conceptualize the legacy motive as the personal motive to engage in generative action in order to achieve a feeling of symbolic immortality. While individuals cannot achieve actual immortality, symbolic immortality refers to the sense of self-extension that individuals achieve when they create a lasting legacy by affiliating themselves with other individuals, institutions,

and value systems that will outlive them. Thus, the legacy motive involves a basic human desire to be part of the larger progression of life, to leave the world a little better off for our presence in it, and to feel as though one has mattered. In other words, the legacy motive involves a desire to establish meaning to one's life, and the legacy itself functions as the carrier of that meaning, extending the self into the future through impacts on future others. Consistent with these perspectives, theory on intergenerational dilemmas has emphasized that intergenerational beneficence can function as a form of symbolic self-extension and generative behavior, and that intergenerational beneficence is consequently enhanced when individuals are motivated to leave a positive legacy (Wade-Benzoni, 2002b; 2006b). Specifically, intergenerational beneficence allows decision makers an opportunity to achieve an impact that affiliates them with others while also extending their personal life meaning and identity through time in the form of a legacy.

This powerful motivation has important implications when considered in juxtaposition with the ethical decision making research on bounded ethicality and the social intuitionist view of ethical decision making. Specifically, while that literature tends to focus on how intuition leads individuals astray (i.e., how intuition leads individuals to be less ethical), we suggest that, when the legacy motive is active, the motivation to leave a positive legacy will function as the intuitive drive that guides decision making, and individuals will consequently favor intergenerational beneficence rather than focusing on the satisfaction of immediate self-interest.

What is crucial about this insight is that it identifies the legacy motive as a mechanism for channeling self-interest toward the pursuit of the long-term interests of the collective. In other words, legacies produce an alignment between the interests of the self and the interests of future others. Specifically, when an individual pursues a legacy, he or she is attempting to create a positive impact on future others, an impact that will persist across time and will therefore allow the individual to feel a sense of self-extension into the future. In this sense, the pursuit of the individual's need to extend the self into the future becomes consistent with the interests of future others, at least as the decision maker defines the interests of future others. Importantly, therefore, we suggest that decisions guided by the legacy motive may not always broadly benefit society, but they will be consistent with the decision maker's perception of the interests of some group of future others. How this group is identified and defined, and how their preferences are inferred or their interests are determined, are issues we take up below when we consider the content of the legacies that individuals are motivated to build. First, however, we consider the factors that activate and enhance the legacy motive.

Factors that Increase the Salience of the Legacy Motive

The desire for meaningful existence has been identified by social and cognitive psychologists as a fundamental aspect of the human experience (e.g., [Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001](#)), and as such, the legacy motive has the potential to emerge for any individual in any context. Factors within the social environment, however, can make the motive more or less salient. In this section, we explore two

types of dynamics that increase the likelihood of the activation of the legacy motive: mortality salience and attention to the ethical implications of future outcomes.

Mortality Salience

Extensive research in the area of terror management theory (TMT) has indicated that fear of death, or death anxiety, is a prominent part of our psychological make-up. A unique paradox of the human condition stems from the juxtaposition of our need for survival, which we share with all forms of life, and our awareness of the inevitability of our own deaths, which differentiates us from other organisms. Our strong drive for self-preservation, combined with our understanding of the certainty of our own eventual deaths, creates an existential dilemma that has the potential to produce overwhelming feelings of anxiety (e.g., Becker, 1973; 1975; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991).

Individuals, however, also have the capacity to buffer themselves from death anxiety through behavioral and cognitive responses to death awareness. TMT research offers substantial support for the notion that people can gain psychological security in the face of death anxiety by striving for symbolic immortality. TMT research indicates that death awareness leads individuals to attempt to feel that they are a part of something larger, more powerful, and more eternal than themselves, such as their family, church, nation, or organization (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). Specifically, after being reminded of their mortality, people exhibit symbolic immortality striving by becoming more defensive of the worldviews (i.e., values and beliefs) embodied by such entities (Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Simon, 1997; Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Simon, 1997; Simon, Greenberg, Harmon-Jones, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Arndt, 1997) and by affiliating and identifying more closely with them (see Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003, for a detailed review).

Thus, research on TMT indicates that death awareness (often referred to as “mortality salience” in the TMT literature) reminds individuals of their desire to live and of the inevitability of death. We argue that the tension created by this awareness is likely to activate the legacy motive, leading individuals to pursue a legacy in order to buffer death anxiety. Recent research on intergenerational allocations of resources supports the notion that acting on the behalf of future others helps to fulfill legacy-building needs and correspondingly buffers death anxiety (Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, & Larrick, 2010). This research further offers support for our contention that, when the legacy motive is activated, time delay can increase (rather than decrease) beneficence. Specifically, in a series of experiments, Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, and Larrick (2010) demonstrated that, when making tradeoffs between self-interest and the interests of others, the experience of mortality salience reversed the effect of time delay, such that under conditions of mortality salience, individuals were more generous to future others than to present others (while the opposite pattern occurred for participants who did not experience mortality salience). In addition, Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, and Larrick (2010) found that the effect of time delay on beneficence was mediated by affinity for those in the mortality salience condition. Specifically, individuals exposed to mortality salience reported

a higher affinity for future others than present others, and therefore allocated more resources to future than present others.

The prevalence of death primes in daily life suggests that this dynamic has the potential to activate the legacy motive quite frequently. For example, the events described in news reports often evoke images or thoughts of death, and empirical research demonstrates that this common type of death reminder can lead to behaviors consistent with legacy motivations (Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, & Larrick, 2010). Similarly, researchers have shown that simply walking past a funeral home can lead to nonconscious death awareness that can have a significant impact on how individuals react to the needs of others (Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002). In addition, some individuals experience occasional or even chronic exposure to death primes at work, such as nurses and funeral employees (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Clark & LaBeff, 1982), or individuals who are involved in or respond to industrial accidents (Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998). Given the vast number of ways in which thoughts of death can arise in daily life, it is likely that the legacy motive is activated or enhanced for many individuals on a daily basis, but what they do with it will depend on the nature of their personal values and their views of the interests of future others (a topic to which we will return below).

Resource Valence

Death awareness is not the only factor that can activate the legacy motive. We also expect that any cue that enhances a decision maker's attention to or awareness of the ethical implications of intergenerational decisions can activate or enhance the legacy motive as well. Specifically, if the ethical implications of one's impact on future others is made salient, the individual is likely to come to view the decision as a legacy-defining decision. Consequently, the legacy motive is either activated or enhanced, and intergenerational beneficence becomes more likely.

Resource valence is one factor that affects individuals' awareness of the ethical implications of intergenerational decisions. Extensive research in the field of psychology provides evidence that negative events (such as enduring a burden) elicit more physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral activity and prompt more cognitive analysis than neutral or positive events (such as experiencing a benefit) (e.g., Taylor, 1991). For example, research has indicated that negative events are more likely to capture attention and elicit greater amounts of contemplation for longer time periods than do neutral or positive events (Abele, 1985; Bohner, Bless, Schwartz, & Strack, 1988; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Pratto & John, 1991; Weiner, 1985).

A critical implication of the powerful impact of negative events and outcomes in eliciting greater attention and contemplation than positive outcomes is that individuals are more likely to recognize ethical implications to the allocation of burdens than they are to the allocation of benefits. This insight suggests that fear of leaving a negative legacy may be an even stronger motivator of ethical behavior than the desire to leave a positive legacy. The following story is a striking example of this fear. After the death of his brother, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, was mistakenly proclaimed deceased by a French newspaper, under the headline: "The Merchant of Death is Dead!" The article went on to describe Nobel as a man

who had gained his wealth by helping people to kill one another. He was dismayed by the prospect of being remembered in such a negative light, especially since he had been diagnosed with a heart condition that threatened his ability to rewrite his legacy. Nobel himself had seen his life's work as that of a scientist dedicated to improving the general welfare of society, and to help the outside world understand his motivations, he dedicated his fortune, which his premature obituary had described as having been gained at the expense of humanity, to recognizing the work of those who had great strides in benefitting the human condition in a variety of fields, with the most valued going to those who had done the most for world peace (Halasz, 1959). A more recent example of seeking to redefine one's legacy is Michael Milken, who was convicted of multiple felonies related to his securities trading, but has given hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years to research in oncology and financial markets.

Based on this reasoning, the legacy motive is more likely to be activated in intergenerational decisions that involve the allocation of burdens (e.g., debt or toxic waste) than in intergenerational decisions that involve the allocation of benefits (e.g., money or natural resources). Consequently, we expect that individuals allocating burdens to future others are more likely to exhibit higher levels of intergenerational beneficence as compared to those allocating benefits intergenerationally. Research has found that this is indeed the case. Specifically, Wade-Benzoni, Sondak, and Galinsky (2010) found that the allocation of burdens in an intergenerational dilemma heightened individuals' attention to the ethical implications of their decisions and consequently led to higher levels of intergenerational beneficence as compared to the allocation of benefits. Further, they found that people were more concerned with their lasting impact on future generations when thinking about the burdens as opposed to the benefits left to them, and more concerned about avoiding leaving a negative legacy than with creating a positive one. This implies that, in organizational settings, both internal and external stakeholders will be more concerned with controlling the burdens the organization places on future others than the extent to which it consumes limited or communal resources that would otherwise have been available to those future generations.

Moral Identity

Moral identity refers to the domain of an individual's self-concept that is organized around a set of moral traits. Aquino and Reed (2002) conceptualize moral identity as an aspect of individuals' social identity that is associated with a specific set of traits (including caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, hardworking, helpful, honest, and kind) that the individual in question views to be relevant to ethical and moral behavior. The strength of moral identity can vary across individuals: for some individuals, moral identity is central to their overall sense of self, while for other individuals moral identity is more peripheral (Aquino & Reed, 2002). For individuals who have a strong sense of moral identity, the ethical implications of their actions are more poignant. Consequently, for an individual with a strong sense of moral identity, the ethical implications of intergenerational decisions are more likely to be apparent than for individuals with a weaker sense of moral identity. We therefore

expect that intergenerational allocations are more likely to activate the legacy motive for individuals who have a strong, relative to individuals who have a weak, sense of moral identity. For example, individuals with high moral identity who also identify strongly as employees of their organization will be unlikely to make decisions that benefit themselves in the present but weaken the firms' prospects for long term viability, because such actions would not be consistent with the image they wish to present to themselves or others as caring, compassionate, and fair. Consequently, we expect that those with a strong sense of moral identity are also more likely to exhibit high levels of intergenerational beneficence, provided, of course, that they recognize the intergenerational aspect of the decisions they face.

At the same time, Aquino and Reed (2002) also argue that the moral traits that make up an individual's moral identity are likely to be cognitively linked to other individuals that are perceived to be high in moral integrity (e.g., Mother Teresa). When an individual observes another individual whom he or she views as high in moral integrity, that observation is likely to function as a prime, activating the individual's moral identity, which in turn will have a greater impact on attitudes and behavior. Thus, moral identity may be either chronically central to an individual's self-concept, or it may be periodically activated by aspects of the social environment (such as observing another person perceived as high in moral integrity) (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). We therefore expect that those who have been primed with moral identity are more likely to be affected by legacy motivations and thus exhibit higher levels of intergenerational beneficence than individuals who have not been primed with a source of moral identity.

On the other hand, moral identity has some surprising effects. While Aquino and Reed (2002) showed that individuals with high trait moral identity act with greater awareness of their impact on others, inducing individuals to think of themselves as moral can sometimes lead to less prosocial behavior. For example, DeCelles and her colleagues showed that individuals with a high sense of moral identity felt that they had earned credit to behave badly, a sense that has been referred to as "moral license" (DeCelles, DeRue, & Margolis, 2009). In the extreme, individuals with high moral identity who are acutely biased in favor of their in-group—as is often the case under conditions of mortality salience (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997)—may go to great lengths to protect future generations of that in-group, even at the expense of society as a whole. For example, consider an employee who becomes aware of the existence of toxic emissions from a company facility. If this individual possesses a strong level of identification with the company's owners, who would presumably suffer material and social costs if the emissions are publicly revealed, that employee may have an inclination to prioritize the interests of the owner (with whom he or she has a strong personal connection) over the interests of other stakeholders who are more interpersonally distant. This inclination could lead the employee to remain silent about the emissions or even to present false information about the company's environmental impact. Moral identity could have either an enhancing or minimizing effect on this tendency. Specifically, if it activates a sense of moral license, it would enhance the effect, making the individual more likely to engage in activities that protect the in-group at the expense of other stakeholders.

If, however, moral license was not evoked, a strong sense of moral identity would instead be expected to minimize this type of unethical behavior. Connecting this back to the legacy motive, we suggest that moral identity enhances the legacy motive as long as it does not simultaneously enact a sense of moral license. Thus, future research into the circumstances under which a strong sense of moral identity does and does not produce moral license would contribute to a greater understanding of the likely impact of moral identity on the activation of the legacy motive and the prospects for intergenerational beneficence.

Power Asymmetry

Power asymmetry is a key characteristic of intergenerational contexts and contributes substantially to the psychological dynamics of intergenerational decisions (Wade-Benzoni, 2002a; 2006a; Wade-Benzoni et al., 2008; Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009). Earlier generations have most or all of the control over how resources will be allocated to subsequent generations. This feature goes hand-in-hand with the fact that later generations do not always have the opportunity to directly reciprocate the behavior of previous generations (Wade-Benzoni, 1999; 2002a).

Contrary to the conventional assumption that power reinforces self-interested tendencies, research shows that power asymmetry can critically change the psychology of decisions in ways that lead the decision maker to be more focused on the interests of others. Research on dictator games, a paradigm used by experimental economists in which decision makers have unilateral choice about the outcomes to themselves and others (e.g., Bolton, Katok, & Zwick, 1998; Forsythe, Horowitz, Savin, & Sefton, 1994; Hoffman, McCabe, & Smith, 1996), shows that power imbalance can induce feelings of social responsibility, and those feelings can heighten people's motivations to help others who are in a powerless position (Berkowitz, 1972; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Greenberg, 1978; Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke, & De Dreu, 2008; Overbeck & Park, 2001). When allocators are confronted with weak recipients, they assess the decision as strategic and competitive, and they consequently act in aggressive ways towards the recipient (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; De Dreu & van Knippenberg, 2005; Suleiman, 1996). If the recipient is completely powerless and cannot retaliate in any way, however, a social responsibility norm can emerge (Handgraaf et al., 2008), leading the ethical implications of the decision to become salient. We therefore expect that any factor that heightens decision makers' awareness of the powerlessness of future others will also heighten the salience of the ethical implications of the decision's impact on future others, thereby activating or enhancing the legacy motive and increasing intergenerational beneficence.

One example of this dynamic can be seen in recent research on the effects of outcome uncertainty on intergenerational beneficence. Specifically, research has shown that the level of outcome uncertainty inherent in an intergenerational dilemma can influence the power felt by the present decision maker. When uncertainty is quite high, such that the possible benefits future generations could receive from a present decision vary dramatically and include the possibility that they may receive nothing, decision makers tend to feel an enhanced experience of power. When,

however, uncertainty is less extreme, present decision makers experience less of the psychological impact of their power. Wade-Benzoni, Hernandez, Medvec, and Messick (Wade-Benzoni et al., 2008) demonstrated this dynamic by showing that when present decision makers are primed with power, the level of uncertainty has relatively little impact on intergenerational decisions, such that beneficence is relatively high for subjects in both high uncertainty and low uncertainty conditions. When, however, present decision makers are not primed with power (i.e., participants in control conditions), high levels of uncertainty produce amounts of intergenerational beneficence roughly equivalent to the beneficence of high power individuals, while individuals in the low uncertainty conditions demonstrate significantly more self-interest.

We suspect that the legacy motive may serve as a mediator for these effects of power and uncertainty. Specifically, we propose that individuals experiencing an enhanced sense of power, or who are aware that there is a high level of uncertainty regarding the fate of future others are likely to be more attuned to the ethical implications of their decision. Consequently, those individuals will experience a stronger motivation to leave an ethical legacy and will engage in greater degrees of intergenerational beneficence.

Cultural Demand

McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) describe generative behavior as stemming in part from cultural demand, which they defined as a norm of conscious concern for the next generation. The extent to which individuals pursue legacies as a response to group norms is a function of two factors: perceptions related to the strength and valence of legacy-related norms within the group, and the centrality of the group to the individual's identity.

Indeed, research on social dilemmas provides evidence that conforming to group norms can have a powerful influence on behavior. For example, several studies (Bixenstine, Levitt, & Wilson, 1966; Fox & Guyer, 1978; Jerdee & Rosen, 1974) show that cooperation is low if individuals are not allowed to communicate (perhaps because a norm of cooperation cannot be constructed), or if defectors cannot be identified (perhaps because norms cannot be enforced). Croson and Marks (1998) found that, as compared to when only group-level information was provided, if information about individual contributions to a public good was provided in an anonymous fashion, contributions fell while variance increased. If, however, individual actions were identifiable by an identification number, contributions rose and variance fell. This finding indicates that knowledge about defection can be seen as undermining the norm, unless conditions support the idea that the group can coordinate and respond to such actions. These results cannot support a conclusion of a utility maximization or fairness preference, because while behavior changed with the introduction of communication, the terms of the game did not. It is also important to note that all of these studies contained an explicit financial reward for defection, but none of them had any explicit social sanction. In fact, other than general disapproval, social sanction was virtually impossible. Group members could not be ostracized or punished, short of the rest of the group acting in accordance with the behavior

seen as deviant. Yet participants responded strongly to the communication of group norms. Thus, the evidence seems to indicate that individuals are internally motivated to respond to the external expectations conveyed by group norms. These types of motivations can strengthen the legacy motive in the presence of group norms that prescribe legacy concerns as important to individual and group identity.

Groups differ in the extent to which they place value on outcomes to future others. We have proposed that legacies consist of interpersonal and intertemporal dimensions. Similarly, [Hofstede \(2001\)](#) proposes that the ways groups reconcile tensions between individualism and collectivism (an interpersonal dimension) and long-term and short-term orientation (an intertemporal dimension) compose two of the five essential dimensions on which cultures differ, with Americans being the most individualistic, and east Asian countries displaying strong long-term orientations. Studies of behavior in social dilemmas, where individuals must choose between maximizing their own outcomes and maximizing benefits to the group, have found evidence of a norm of self-interest in economics and business students ([Cadsby and Maynes, 1998](#); [Marwell & Ames, 1981](#)), professors ([Frank & Schulze, 2000](#)), experienced accountants ([Ponemon, 1992](#)), and managers ([Elm & Nichols, 1993](#)). Less is known, however, about which groups, if any, are particularly concerned about their impact on present and future others. Hofstede's (2001) inquiry into long-term orientation does not distinguish between intrapersonal and intergenerational orientation, but it is reasonable to assume that differences exist among national cultures and group cultures on this dimension as well. Further exploration of the expectations of different groups regarding their members' duties and actions towards future generations could prove to be fertile ground for future research. We expect that the legacy motive is likely to be strengthened for individuals within cultures that emphasize responsibility to future others, and we expect that this strengthening will be particularly powerful for those who identify highly with those cultures.

The other aspect of cultural demand that is likely to influence legacy-building is the centrality of the group to the individual's identity. Tapping directly into the role of attachment to a group that displays a legacy norm, [Shang, Reed, and Croson \(2008\)](#) found that women who scored highly on a measure of collective self esteem donated more money to future generations of research when told that a previous woman had donated her full earnings as a participant than they did when told that a man had done the same. Women who scored low in collective esteem, however, indicating that they did not identify strongly with other women, actually donated more when told that a man had given than when a woman had. This example suggests that when an individual identifies highly with a group that has an established practice of exhibiting concern for future generations, the strength of the legacy motive is likely to be enhanced.

Factors that Influence Legacy Content

While factors such as mortality salience, moral identity, resource valence, power, uncertainty, and cultural demand can activate or enhance the legacy motive, there are also a variety of factors that can impact the content of the legacies that individuals

are motivated to pursue. In this section, we examine some of these factors. First, we return to the role of mortality salience and consider how different types of death awareness may lead individuals to target different groups of future others and to manifest different types of values in their legacy-building activities. Second, we discuss the impacts of cultural factors on how present decision makers understand the interests and potential preferences of future others. Third, we discuss the role of work value orientation in determining how individuals utilize their relationships with organizations to craft their legacies.

Death Reflection versus Death Anxiety

As described above, reminders of mortality tend to activate the legacy motive. There are reasons to expect, however, that the impact of mortality salience may not always be uniform across individuals or social circumstances. In addition to research on terror management, research on generativity also seeks to understand behaviors arising from thoughts of death, but comes to different conclusions about how people react when forced to confront their own mortality ([Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009](#)). Terror management theorists draw on the work of Ernest Becker (1973) to argue that, while all creatures possess a basic desire to live, human beings are unique in the awareness that death is inevitable, and that this creates an existential dilemma that causes great anxiety. To defend against this anxiety, people create cultural worldviews—symbolic conceptions of reality that 1) give life order, permanence and stability; 2) offer a set of standards by which behavior can be judged; and 3) offer hope of immortality either literally, through belief in an afterlife, or symbolically, through affiliation with social institutions that will presumably outlast the self ([Pyszczynski et al., 1999](#)). Generativity scholars, on the other hand, see death awareness as a natural extension of the aging process. In Erikson's (1963) model, generativity is a stage of the life cycle that individuals enter into once they have developed a personal sense of identity by psychologically establishing who they are in relation to their communities and the other important people in their lives. In the generative stage, individuals begin to pursue actions that benefit valued communities and relationships and that promote their continuity across generations. In the generative paradigm, thoughts of death arise primarily out of the aging process, and result in a desire to craft something long lasting and meaningful (i.e., a legacy).

The question of whether death awareness drives behavior in defense of an existing worldview as an enduring source of meaning or towards the creation and promotion of entities that can serve to give life meaning in the present by extending some part of the self symbolically into the future is not a semantic one. Terror management researchers have consistently found that mortality salience leads individuals to act in ways that defend themselves and their in-group, including increased donations to a domestic charity, but not an international one ([Jonas et al., 2002](#)), endorsing longer prison sentences for worldview threatening criminals ([Arndt, Leiberhan, Cook, & Solomon, 2004](#)), and allocating large amounts of hot sauce to worldview threatening others who dislike spicy foods ([McGregor et al., 1998](#)). Meanwhile other research has seemed to lend support to generativity perspectives, with individuals with self-serving values responding to death awareness by endorsing self-transcendent values

([Joireman & Duell, 2005](#)), seeking closer ties with relatives, and accomplishing meaningful goals ([Lykins, Segerstrom, Averill, Evans, & Kemeny, 2007](#)).

Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009) show how the difference can be accounted for by describing how thoughts of death are processed. They argue that when death awareness leads to anxiety, it tends to be processed emotionally in the “hot” experiential system, which tends to be impulsive, visceral, and intuitive, but when the thought of death is characterized by reflection, it is processed in the “cool” cognitive system, which is deliberate, intentional, and systematic. They point to studies that have included direct manipulations of emotional versus rational approaches to death awareness and found that negative reactions to worldview threatening out-group members disappeared when cognitive processes were activated (Simon, Greenberg, Harmon-Jones, Solomon, Pyszczynski, Arendt, & Abend, 1997). In addition, Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009) point to research in which extrinsically-motivated individuals have responded to death anxiety by claiming more of a shared resource, but claimed less in a death reflection condition (Cozzolino, Staples, Meyers, & Sambocetti, 2004). Similarly, research has also indicated that death anxiety tends to have intense, but short-lived effects, while death reflection leads to milder more durable changes in behavior ([Lykins et al., 2007](#)). The net effect is that both death anxiety and death reflection can activate legacy motives, but in different ways and with different effects. Specifically, while both death anxiety and death reflection can lead to actions that are beneficial to future others, legacy building behaviors that stem from a fear of death (i.e., death anxiety) will tend to be consistent with self-interest and a focus on the in-group as the beneficiary of the legacy (accumulating wealth to leave to one’s family, affiliating with groups that can protect one from external threats), while those that arise from a calculated understanding of the inevitability of death (i.e., death reflection) will focus on providing the maximum benefit to future generations (philanthropic endeavors, seeking meaningful work in dangerous professions).

One consideration that can impact whether a death prime leads to death anxiety or death reflection is the immediacy of the feelings of threat associated with the prime. Specifically, a single event can cause death to be seen as either an immediate threat or a distant inevitability ([Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009](#)). When the threat is immediate, death anxiety is evoked and, consistent with the reasoning outlined above, generative behaviors are likely to be limited to those that are consistent with short-term self-preservation and that protect and preserve the interests of the in-group. When the threat is more distant, however, death reflection is evoked and a broader range of intergenerationally beneficent behaviors can emerge ([Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009](#)). For example, consider the impact of the 9/11 attacks on people contemplating a career in firefighting. For active firefighters present at the tragedy, the event threatened their lives directly, in a way that marked a dramatic, but brief, spike in the dangers associated with their jobs. This type of threat is associated with high death anxiety and low death reflection ([Grant and Wade-Benzoni, 2009](#)). As might be expected, these workers displayed self-protective withdrawal behaviors, as well as higher levels of stress and depression ([Bacharach and Bamberger, 2007](#)). The event prompted a different response from non-firefighters considering the ca-

reer. For them, the attacks marked an increased threat level that continues to this day, but was removed from their daily lives, and did not seem to directly threaten them. Individuals who are made aware of death in this fashion are not likely to feel anxious, but are more likely to reflect on the meaning of death in their lives (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009). As a result, many such individuals were drawn to helping professions such as firefighting, despite the dangers (Wrzesniewski, 2002). Thus, death reflection and death anxiety produced divergent motivational orientations in the two groups. Those experiencing death anxiety focused more narrowly on the self and on a narrowly defined in-group, while those experiencing death reflection focused more broadly on their role in their communities.

This example also supports our contention that death anxiety leads individuals to focus on legacy building activities that are targeted toward protecting the self and the in-group (such as maximizing resource accumulation to benefit both themselves and their children and grandchildren), while death reflection, on the other hand, may lead to a focus on legacy building activities that affect a broader range of future others. As another example of this dynamic, consider an individual who is faced with a decision in which the financial interests of her family's business are in conflict with the environmental protection. For this individual, a death prime that produces an immediate and proximate fear of death, and hence produces death anxiety, would lead her to consider the legacy that she is leaving to her family, which will motivate her to protect her family's interests. If, however, she experiences a death prime that is more compatible with death reflection, she may be more inclined to consider her broader personal values and how she'd like to be remembered as an individual. Consequently, death reflection would lead her to work to create an individual legacy that is consistent with her values. If environmentalism is a more sacred value to her than family loyalty, then she would consequently be more likely to be willing to sacrifice her family's material interests to protect the environment.

Individual and Group Values as Influences on Legacy Content

While death anxiety and death reflection can have an impact on the types of values that are emphasized in legacies, individual and group values can also have a more direct impact on the content of legacies. Specifically, individual and group values influence what individuals believe to be the interests of future others. For example, individuals who are politically conservative are more likely to place value on issues of group loyalty, authority, and purity than are individuals who are politically liberal (Haidt & Graham, 2007) and conservatives are therefore more likely to think that maximizing these values is in the interests of future others. Consequently, individuals who are more politically conservative are more likely than individuals who are politically liberal to cultivate legacies that prioritize the preservation of tradition and the protection of existing authority and status hierarchies.

Research on the role of perceptions of value in family businesses provides another type of example of the role of personal beliefs and values in determining the content of the legacy an individual wishes to leave. Specifically, Bradford (2009) describes several different approaches to the use of family businesses in intergenerational gifting. Some family members perceive the business as a resource whose

value is to be consumed by future generations, while others instill the business with a broader meaning, giving it an inalienable character to be nurtured and supported by future generations out of respect for what it represents. These divergent views about the value that the family business represents have important implications for how different family members make decisions that impact the future prospects for the business and for other organizational members. As a consequence of perceiving these types of divergences, some heads of family businesses refuse to transfer ownership to their heirs, out of fears that their heirs will not understand and preserve the legacy they wish to leave.

These fears are not limited to family businesses. [Graebner \(2009\)](#) describes the importance of trust to the managers of technology companies being acquired. Executives at these companies placed much higher value on trusting their partners than did acquiring companies, and only one company in her survey actually agreed to be purchased by a partner that was not trusted. This emphasis was not related to selling price, but rather a desire to insure that the company would be run in a way that was respectful of the values attached to the organization and the people who would continue working there. Sellers described strong legacy motivations, saying things like, “Our reason for starting this company wasn’t money. . . . We wanted to work for ourselves and have fun, create a great work environment, and if we can create something of lasting value, great,” and “I’m not here for a quick buck, I’m here to do my big thing.” Several buyers underestimated the importance of such motivations, assuming that financial considerations were most important, and were confused when key people at acquired companies left, despite strong financial incentives to stay, after they came to the conclusion that they could not continue to use their role in the company to create a lasting impact. Interestingly, venture capitalists, whose interest in the companies being purchased was much more financial than the managers, broadly recognized the importance of the legacy motive to the firms’ founders, and put very little pressure on them to take deals from companies that managers didn’t trust—noting that such an approach would be significant detriment to their ability to gain future business. Entrepreneurs who create and grow organizations, which they later go on to sell, display clear signals of legacy motivations. Companies that pursue an acquisition of such a company ought to conduct their courtship with a process that understands the motives of the sellers ([Jemison and Sitkin, 1986](#); [Sinetar 1981](#)), and offers them the opportunity to continue to use the organization to craft their legacy, if retaining the employees of the company is important to the success of the merger.

In addition to the influence of individual values and beliefs on the content of legacies, different groups emphasize different values, as explained in the section on cultural demand, and to the extent that an individual identifies strongly with a group, that individual is likely to make it a priority to act in accordance with the values and interests of that group. Of course, individuals are members of multiple groups, and the importance of various group memberships to individual identity varies across individuals and contexts ([Stryker, 1968](#); [Stryker & Burke, 2000](#)). This variance can affect not only whether a person seeks to build a legacy, but also the form that legacy takes and the values that the individual seeks to maximize for future others. For

example, consider a community board that is presented with a company's petition to build a factory. Board members could support the development as a lasting economic benefit to future generations of local workers, or oppose it as durably undermining future generations' access to green space. Which perspective they are likely to take is likely to depend upon their affiliation with different community groups. For example, do they identify with a constituency that would benefit considerably from the additional jobs? Or do they instead identify with a constituency that prioritizes environmental conservation? The relative strength of their ties to these two types of groups will influence their perspective on what types of values they should be maximizing for future others, and will consequently affect their decision.

Thus, both personal values and group values and memberships can impact the types of values that an individual views as important for future others. These values in turn influence the type of legacy that the individual seeks to build.

Work Value Orientation

Another important factor affecting how the relationship between employees and an organization influences the content of their legacy building activities is their work value orientation. Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) describe individuals as approaching their work as (1) a job, which provides them the means with which to enjoy other aspects of their lives, (2) a career, which provides them with a sense of personal value derived from their advancement within the occupational structure, with its attendant increases in prestige, power, and self-esteem, or (3) a calling, wherein the work done is seen as a socially valuable end, in and of itself. Job oriented employees may tend to use their employment to enhance their ability to pursue a legacy external to the work environment, for example, taking advantage of work programs that match donations to schools or community groups. Career oriented employees might be more drawn to legacy building activities that are public, status enhancing, or that enable them to leave a personal footprint, such as managing an acquisition that will shape the direction of the company for years to come. Calling oriented employees would likely be drawn to legacies that embody what they see as a reflection of the organization's core values. Zookeepers, for example, have shown an extraordinary commitment to the animals in their care, due to their calling orientation, and this commitment leads to and feeds off of their perceptions that the reason for the existence of the zoo, and even themselves, is to preserve biodiversity and encourage conservationist thinking, in order to make a positive impact on animals in a way that will outlive their presence at the zoo or even on the planet. They are therefore willing to work for wages that are significantly lower than other college educated individuals, and are greatly disturbed when they believe that resources have been diverted from that mission ([Bunderson & Thompson, 2009](#)).

PROMOTING ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE DECISIONS IN BUSINESS CONTEXTS

A fascinating manifestation of the legacy motive in organizational settings is that the organization itself can function as either the beneficiary of an individual's legacy or as the legacy itself. An entrepreneur may see the organization she created as the collective to which she seeks to provide enduring value by ensuring that she does not place undue burdens on future generations of organizational actors when she retires or sells the firm. Alternatively, she may craft her organization in such a way as to provide economic benefits to her family or her community, or to safeguard and perpetuate values which she sees as essential to her own identity. An institutional legacy is a specific form of personal legacy in which the individual strives for symbolic immortality by emphasizing his or her connection to an enduring institution (in this case, the organization) that will presumably exist far into the future. In this section, we discuss ways in which organizational leaders can harness the power of the legacy motive to encourage sustainable and ethical decision making by organizational members.

We view sustainability as a status that organizations achieve when they function such that the benefits that will be passed on to future generations are not decreased, the burdens are not increased, and the capacity of individual stakeholders to reach their potential is progressively enhanced. In order to reach this status, it is critical that organizational members take a long-range temporal perspective on the activities of the organization. We suggest that one way to encourage the adoption of a long-range temporal perspective is to encourage members to view the organization as an avenue for building an institutional legacy. This can be achieved in several ways.

Ethical Infrastructure

One way to encourage a long-range temporal perspective and a view of the organization as a channel for an institutional legacy is to ensure that the concept of legacy is pervasive in the organization. Tenbrunsel and her colleagues (Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003) have identified the concept of an organization's ethical infrastructure, which is composed of both formal and informal elements, such as surveillance systems, ethical climates, and organizational communications. These systems provide a structure that, when aligned, give employees a framework for the use of ethical decision making across a broad range of organizational contexts. We suggest that the extent to which the legacy concept pervades an organization's ethical infrastructure will have a direct and positive impact on the tendency for organizational members to view the organization as a channel for creating an institutional legacy. Therefore, to encourage this perspective, organizations should emphasize the legacy construct in both formal and informal aspects of the ethical infrastructure.

Organizations can create an infrastructure to reinforce their commitment to legacy building in a variety of formal and informal ways. For example, mission statements can emphasize that the organization aims to leave a positive legacy for future generations, and ethical codes of conduct can highlight that an important dimension of consideration for any decision is the impact of the decision on future

others. Similarly, written performance standards can specify that employees will be evaluated according to the extent to which their performance in the organization helps to further the organization's positive legacy.

In addition, the behavior of organizational leaders can reinforce the prevalence of the legacy construct in these formal systems and extend that prevalence into the informal domains of organizational culture and ethical climate. Specifically, when organizational leaders emphasize the importance of the organization's legacy when they talk about organizational goals, this is likely to enhance the prevalence of the legacy-oriented perspective throughout the organization. At the same time, however, it is important that leaders supplement their words with action, most critically by viewing the organization as a channel for their own institutional legacies as well, at times sacrificing their present material self-interest for the long-term interests of the organization and its stakeholders (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004). Again, given that the legacy motive aligns personal self-interest with the interests of future others, leaders are more likely to engage in this type of behavior (i.e., sacrificing present material self-interest for the long-term interests of the organization and its stakeholders) to the extent that they are motivated to pursue a legacy and to the extent that they view the organization as a vehicle for the creation of an institutional legacy.

Importantly, the absence of ethical infrastructure is likely to undermine legacy building and threaten the sustainability of the organization. Perceptions that some companies and industries lack sufficient formal and informal structures to encourage ethical behavior did not start with the current crisis. Bernard Madoff's billion-dollar Ponzi scheme—a pure form of intergenerational dilemma wherein present generations of investors could only benefit at the expense of future generations—was made possible by cultivating relationships with regulators and seeking out an accountant who prosecutors say never even conducted an audit, allowing him to operate outside even the slightest ethical framework. Similarly, as Jeff Skilling undermined Enron's formal controls, he created environment where not only did employees earn a reputation for dishonesty in their relations with customers and even other business units within the company, but the cross generational impact was such that individuals knew that when a deal failed to live up to their deliberately overstated projections, they would have already moved on (McLean & Elkind, 2003: 122). The lack of ethical infrastructure appeared to suppress the legacy motive, which in turn, undermined the ethical infrastructure." Deregulation of the financial services industry can be seen as a reduction in the formal ethical infrastructure, and there appears to have been little in the way of informal structures to take its place. One executive at a boutique Wall Street firm describes how, when he was seeking to enter the business, he was always asked about how much money he wanted to make, which led him, and presumably others to assume that "They want people who think 'I'm greedy. I want to be a billionaire.' That was viewed as a really good thing" (Sherman, 2009). [Kay and Ross \(2003\)](#) found that referring to a prisoner's dilemma as the "Wall Street Game" led to less cooperation than when it was called the "Community Game," especially when participants were encouraged to think in advance about whether others would cooperate. Given the low levels of ethical infrastructure in the financial

services industry, it should not be surprising that this leads to the valuing of financial considerations over other interests of stakeholders, but it can also contribute to an attitude of what some finance executives called a culture of “I’ll be gone, you’ll be gone,” (Sherman 2009) wherein employees enjoyed the benefits of taking big risks, with the costs to be borne by subsequent generations of company employees—for whom the current generation often felt little concern.

Thus, we propose that organizations can fight against these tendencies by creating a strong ethical infrastructure that emphasizes the legacy construct. We expect that as the legacy construct is increasingly integrated into the ethical infrastructure of an organization, its prevalence will act as a persistent cue that can prime the legacy motive and thereby promote a long-term perspective for organizational decision makers.

Linking to the Past

In addition to incorporating the legacy construct into the ethical infrastructure of the organization, a long-term legacy perspective can also be encouraged by promoting intergenerational organizational identification. Intergenerational identification refers to the perception or feeling of oneness with other (past and/or future) generations of organizational actors (Wade-Benzoni, 2003). The higher the level of intergenerational identification a decision maker feels with future others, the more likely the decision maker is to feel connected with future others, to engage in perspective-taking regarding the interests of future others, and to have empathy for future others (Tost, et al., 2008). A wide range of factors affecting the extent of intergenerational identification have been identified, including the decision maker’s motivation for self-enhancement, the decision maker’s holistic needs, group social identity, the specificity with which future others are identified, decision framing, and relations with previous generations (see Wade-Benzoni, 2003, for a detailed review). Here, however, we focus on a somewhat non-obvious approach to utilizing intergenerational identification to promote a long-term legacy perspective: specifically, we argue that one way to increase identification with future others is to focus on the links between the present and the past.

In organizational contexts, feelings of identification with past generations of organizational actors may be easier to facilitate than identification with future others because past generations are more readily identified and specified, and the role that members of past generations played in creating the present group context makes the connection between past and present more easily clarified than the connection between the present and the future. Critically, to the extent that a decision maker identifies with past generations, that individual has already come to view different generations as members of one group. In addition, theorists have argued that understandings of the past can have a powerful impact on feelings about the future (Sherif, 1966). Therefore, we suggest that enhancing identification with past generations can increase the affinity that a decision maker feels with future generations, thereby leading the decision maker to consider the interests of future others, which increases the likelihood that the organization will be viewed as a vehicle of legacy building and can further enhance the legacy motive.

One way to enhance identification with past generations of organizational actors would be to highlight the beneficent actions of members of past generations. Highlighting the role of past actors in affecting the present context can have the effect of encouraging present decision makers to view the organization as an in-group that has continuity over time through sequences of generations, which in turn increases the likelihood of identification and affinity with future organizational actors and thereby enhances the legacy motive. Drawing attention to the intergenerationally beneficent actions of previous generations has been shown to increase individuals' willingness to forgo current benefits to preserve resources for the future (Wade-Benzoni, 2002a). At the same time, highlighting the impact of past organizational actors can also serve as a reminder to present decision makers that, while future generations may not be presently identifiable to them, the decision makers themselves will be remembered by future others (just as past actors are presently remembered) and that those future others will judge them by the legacy they leave. Previous research in this domain has focused on tasks in which the actions of the immediately preceding generation in a particular task affects the way the current generation acts towards the immediately following generation in the same task (Wade-Benzoni, 2002a). Future research can relax the boundary conditions of this effect and look at behavior if actors in the present must act differently than those in the past to provide similar benefits to future generations, or whether consideration of the actions of past generations or concern for future ones extends beyond the immediately adjoining groups at a constant rate, or if individuals discount benefits accrued sooner at a higher rate than those in the distant future, as has been shown to be the case when evaluating benefits and costs that accrue to oneself.

Understanding and Communicating the Role of Managers as Agents

The existence of the legacy motive has important implications for agency in organizations. Friedman (1970) declares that a corporate executive "has direct responsibility to his owners. That responsibility is to conduct the business in accordance with their desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible, while conforming to the basic rules of society, both those embodied in law, and those embodied in custom." Consistent with the literature covered by this article, the desires of individuals, including those who own companies, are likely to be more complex than conveyed by Friedman's statements above. In some cases, immortality striving may trump short-term financial incentives, shareholders may be willing to sacrifice short-term financial benefits in order to create a lasting impact on future generations. Friedman (1970) argues that to the extent such values are important to owners, management serves their interests best by maximizing profits, and allowing the owners to "spend their own money on the particular action if they wished to do so."

Relevant to our discussion of legacies, [Tumlinson \(2010\)](#) describes two situations in which this logic can break down. One reason shareholders might be inclined to contribute less to the welfare of future generations is a belief that their contribution will be diluted by smaller contributions from others when a substantial collective effort is needed in order to make a meaningful difference. Thus, to the extent that a

managerial decision to reduce a firm's carbon footprint is coupled with an effort to reduce fears that others will not show the same concerns as well, shareholders will be inclined to support larger contributions collectively than they would individually. Second, as costs rise faster than revenue, the last few units of production are associated with a diminishing level of profit to invest while the burdens increase at a constant rate, and an increasing proportion of public goods are consumed as production increases. This indicates that in industries with negative side effects that span across generations, shareholders cannot possibly hope to "reinvest" their share of profits to offset the intergenerational burdens placed on future generations by the companies they own. As shown in the research on legacies described above, shareholders are likely to be particularly concerned about these effects when externalities are viewed as burdens left to future generations, or if there is a risk that a resource will be consumed at such a rate that future generations may not receive any of it.

When Friedman (1970) first stated that the motivation of owners would be to make as much money as possible, the evidence of a legacy motive was thin. Few of the books and articles we cite in this review would have been available to him at the time, and many of them have become available to researchers only in the last few years. It is perhaps time for business scholars to revisit our roles as educators, in light of what we have discovered. Recent calls to revise the business school curriculum, due in part to the ethical lapses of graduates, have been raised both externally (Economist, 2009) and internally (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005, 2009; Khurana, 2007) to the profession. Our intention is not to challenge the existence of self-interest, indeed we have acknowledged the importance of this phenomenon. Nor is our intention to prove or disprove the existence of double hermeneutics or self fulfilling prophecies, though we would hope that the content of our instruction does affect the behavior of our students. Rather we suggest that the researchers that teach business principles acknowledge the importance of the very research that they have done, in the interests of providing the best possible knowledge to their students. In the context of this paper, that means helping students to understand how and when people consider their impact on future generations to be important, and acknowledging a role for the legacy motive as related to the ideas, such as agency theory, that we consider important enough to include in our curriculum.

A Cautionary Note

As we mention above, a number of factors can impact the content of an individual's legacy, and the ethicality of that legacy is not guaranteed. Because the legacy motive can be quite powerful by virtue of its association with the individual's life meaning and identity, it is important that organizations that utilize a legacy approach to promoting sustainability do so within a context of an organizational culture that emphasizes ethics and social responsibility and that promotes a broad view of the interests of organizational stakeholders. Specifically, it is important that stakeholders are not defined so narrowly that the institutional legacies that individuals pursue focus on such a narrow range of future others (e.g., future shareholders only) that individuals end up promoting a positive legacy for a small number of future others at the expense of leaving a negative legacy for other future groups and individuals.

CONCLUSION

Present-day decision makers have an unprecedented power to affect the outcomes of future generations across a broad range of issues. Present-day decisions in the realms of business and politics affect the amount of sustainable resources left to future generations, the prospects for global environmental change, the functioning of social security and financial systems, the manageability of national-level budget deficits, and the quality of health and educational systems across the globe, among a wide variety of other issues—all with intergenerational implications. In this article, we have reviewed and integrated research indicating that the legacy motive can have a critical impact on intergenerational, and thus sustainable, behavior. Specifically, we have argued that factors such as mortality salience, resource valence, moral identity, power asymmetry, outcome uncertainty, and culture can activate or enhance the legacy motive and can also impact the content and targets of the legacies that individuals attempt to build. We have further discussed the ways in which organizations can harness the power of the legacy motive to encourage sustainable and ethical decision making among organizational members. These ideas can provide a useful reference point for future research on legacies, sustainability, and business ethics, as well as offer practitioners valuable information about how to achieve their own legacy building aspirations in building sustainable organizations.

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