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The Making of an Authentic Leader's Internalized Moral Perspective: The Role of Internalized Ethical Philosophies in the Development of Authentic Leaders' Moral Identity

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of ethical philosophies on developing an authentic leader's internalized moral perspective. It builds on prior research on moral identity, proposing that ethical philosophies such as deontology, rule utilitarianism, and virtue can be internalized over time to form an authentic leader's internalized moral identity. The paper argues that while virtues and altruism are discussed in the authentic leadership literature, the relevance of other ethical philosophies to authentic leadership has been largely overlooked. These ethical philosophies embedded in business settings can be internalized and become integral to the content of a leader's moral identity rather than merely being lenses for moral reasoning. Authentic leaders' moral identities regulate their moral motivation and actions. In addition, the paper posits that internalized ethical philosophies can be activated by triggering events or changing the domain of moral issues. Authentic leaders with highly internalized moral identities are also encouraged to be morally modest, reflecting on different ethical philosophies when facing new challenges and internalizing them as needed while staying committed to their virtue-centric moral identity. This interdisciplinary paper proposes a framework and presents theoretical propositions to further understand the role of ethical philosophies in shaping an authentic leader's internalized moral perspective.

Keywords Authentic leader · Moral identity · Ethical philosophies · Internalized moral perspective · Internalization

Introduction

Although past literature has discussed different aspects of authentic leadership (AL) for addressing some problems, such as declining trust and transparency in some business environments, several researchers consider *internalized moral perspective* as the central component of AL (Hannah et al., 2005, 2014; May et al., 2003; Peus et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2008). The literature has emphasized the internalized moral component of AL because authentic leaders without this perspective have no internal moral guidance in dealing with complex issues of today's business. Accordingly, a critical question can be raised: 'What is the content of an authentic leader's internalized moral perspective?'

This is an essential question to answer for the helpfulness of AL in business ethics. The content of authentic leaders' morality specifies how they react to business issues and ethical dilemmas and what types of morality authentic leaders transfer to organizational members as their followers. In addition, when managers develop AL characteristics, they need to recognize what ethical frameworks are beneficial to internalize during such developmental experiences as a part of the content of their internalized moral perspective. Despite the criticality of these issues, they are almost overlooked in the literature. Similarly, Hannah et al. (2014) criticized the literature on moral-related leadership theories such as AL. They asserted that "these theories and measures prescribe that morality is a component of their theory, the form or nature of that morality is left to the respondent" (p. 604).

In this introduction, I elaborate on why the internalized moral perspective component of AL needs further clarification. A critical gap identified in the literature is explained concerning the link between ethical philosophies (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics) and the content of an authentic leader's internalized moral perspective, which

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relates to the link between ethical philosophies and moral psychology. Second, I explain why focusing on authentic leaders' moral identity can fill this gap. Then, three main questions of this article are presented based on the idea of internalizing ethical philosophies into authentic leaders' moral identities. Finally, I justify why the new conceptualization provided in this paper is significant for using moral identity as a malleable and dynamic capacity for authentic leaders containing an integration of the internalization of ethical philosophies.

Despite emphasizing the importance of the internalized moral perspective in initial works on AL and its use in the following empirical research, the construct is broadly conceptualized as having characteristics of honesty, integrity, and transparency (Walumbwa et al., 2008), possibly inspired by the virtue philosophy emphasizing virtues (e.g., courage, justice, wisdom, and compassion) of moral actors and the literature on character strengths in psychology (Gardner et al., 2011; Wang & Hackett, 2020). The conceptualization has gradually developed over the years. Other theoretical and empirical papers (e.g., Hannah et al., 2005; Lemoine et al., 2019; May et al., 2003) have discussed morality, incorporating other conceptual features, such as moral identity, moral capacities, and considering internalized ethical philosophies such as virtue ethics and altruism. However, a comparative discussion on the impacts of ethical philosophies on the content of the internalized moral perspective as a key component of AL has yet to be presented (Lemoine et al., 2019). The internalization of the benefits of ethical philosophies embedded in external regulations (e.g., contracts, organizational rules, business strategies, HRM policies and regulations, and ethical codes) can gradually form authentic leaders' moral perspectives. From this perspective, this manuscript's primary goal is to explain the internalization and activation of authentic leaders' morality.

This paper, building upon theoretical ideas proposed by Wang and Hackett (2020) and Hannah et al. (2005) and other similar works (e.g., Hannah et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2015; Lemoine et al., 2019; May et al., 2003), primarily argues that the internalization of the values of ethical philosophies into authentic leaders' moral identity is significant in understanding the internalized moral perspective component of AL. This internalization makes the values of these ethical philosophies the content of authentic leaders' moral identities, which can regulate authentic leaders' moral motivations and actions. This moral identity can also be activated whenever necessary.

The term *ethical philosophy* is used consistently in this paper to indicate a framework of ethics from a normative perspective. These philosophies are embedded in social and institutional or business settings that we live in (Jennings et al., 2015; Paik et al., 2019). They are practiced daily because business institutions and practices, such as business contracts, business networking, corporate governance principles, and leadership development programs and initiatives, are implicitly formed based on such ethical philosophies. For example, a contract can be based on utilitarianism to guarantee benefits to every party involved while paying attention to some rules and rights. When a business leader learns how to prepare a contract to satisfy all party's interests and rights or a manager participates in meetings to negotiate proposals, they have opportunities to internalize the benefits of different ethical frameworks. Theoretically speaking, this paper argues that the moral aspect of AL is shaped during such experiences based on internalization mechanisms. Mechanisms such as personal reflections (Shadnam, 2020) and being influenced by a role model (Brown & Treviño, 2006) can support these internalizations. Such philosophies as our *knowledge* of ethics can impact the content of our reasoning and judgment (Jennings et al., 2015). However, the current paper incorporates their benefits into the discussion from the perspective of the content of authentic leaders' moral identities, not solely as rules for their moral reasoning.

As will be discussed later, this paper considers moral identity (Hannah et al., 2011) a critical part of an authentic leader's internalized moral perspective. According to Hannah et al. (2011), moral identity refers to one's self-concept regarding who they are about morality. The most straightforward question to clarify the concept may be 'Am I a good person?' and one of the complex questions in this subject is, 'What ethical action is most in line with my beliefs about myself?' (p. 670). Ethical philosophies are critical in understanding this component of AL because internalizing them provides frameworks for understanding the content of authentic leaders' moral identities that regulate their moral motivation and actions. In addition, understanding and learning ethical philosophies may also be helpful for authentic leaders in their reasoning, moral sensitivity, and identifying cognitive solutions for moral issues (Hannah et al., 2011). Having internalized moral identity helps authentic leaders as moral actors use such ethical philosophies in their moral motivation and actions, not merely as a cognitive or reasoning skill.

Addressing the content of authentic leaders' morality is helpful from practical viewpoints in business ethics (Greenwood & Freeman, 2018), as it impacts authentic leaders' moral motivations and actions in different business situations. For example, an authentic leader whose moral identity is according to the virtue of care may generate different results when developing a compensation system than another authentic leader with the same virtue who also values utilitarianism and emphasizes justice as an ethical rule. There are also examples in the business ethics literature of when AL impacts employees' helping behaviors (Hirst et al., 2016), possibly because of having the care virtue or when the characteristic of Machiavellianism has a negative impact

on the influence of AL on moral actions due to the emphasis of Machiavellianism on the notion of 'the end justifies the means' (Sendjaya et al., 2016a, 2016b). Some other business-related examples are provided throughout the paper to link the idea of the authentic leaders' internalization of ethical philosophies and how they may activate their integrated moral identity in different situations.

Based on the above introduction, the primary idea of this paper can be explored based on three interrelated questions. The first fundamental question of this paper is: 'What is the content of an authentic leader's moral identity concerning each ethical philosophy?'. This paper briefly reviews the three main ethical philosophies and discusses how these can impact an authentic leader's moral identity. Moral identity as a multifaceted phenomenon (Hannah et al., 2011) may contain different ethical philosophies internalized during different life experiences (e.g., an authentic leader with the virtue of care who values utilitarianism to some degree and emphasizes justice as an ethical rule). Thus, the second question can be: 'Can different internalized ethical philosophies be integrated into an authentic leader's moral identity?'. The third question, which is interrelated to the previous questions, is: 'How do internalized ethical philosophies as a part of moral identity regulate an authentic leader's moral behavior, and how do authentic leaders activate them in different situations?'. These questions are critical for understanding AL because they need to have integrated internalized moral identities that can impact and guide their moral motivation and actions across different business situations (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Considering the interdisciplinary nature of these questions, this paper, based on integrating areas in the psychology and philosophy disciplines, proposes a framework for answering the above questions, which is helpful for further empirical investigations. This interdisciplinary approach is well-recognized in the business ethics literature (Greenwood & Freeman, 2017).

The leadership literature so far usually makes distinctions between discussions on ethical philosophies and moral identity due to the differences in the nature of these phenomena (Jennings et al., 2015; Miner & Petocz, 2003). The literature considers ethical philosophies mainly as *knowledge*, *theoretical lens, tendencies, reasoning philosophy*, or *individuals' judgment dispositions* (Jennings et al., 2015). However, in this paper, the moral identity associated with those ethical philosophies is mainly related to motivational self-regulation mechanisms and acting concerning moral issues (Jennings et al., 2015). Consistent with the approach proposed by Lemoine and colleagues (2019), this paper also suggests that internalizing the benefits of ethical philosophies into a leader's moral identity, as a malleable and profound description of self, can impact the leader's moral motivation and action. After reviewing the theoretical foundations and propositions

of the paper, discussions on the theoretical framework are presented following suggestions for future research.

## Theoretical Foundations and Propositions

In the following sub-sections, discussions are presented to support the theoretical framework of the paper presented in Fig. 1. First, I explain authentic leadership (AL) and the crucial role of the internalized moral perspective in AL. Second, the nature of this key component is discussed, reviewing different approaches discussed in the literature. This section is critical to review to show that the initial conceptualization of internalized moral perspective needed to be clarified. However, several approaches in the literature have been used to conceptualize leaders' morality, such as their moral capacities, moral values, virtues, and moral identity. The second section concludes that the concept of moral identity can be the core aspect of internalized moral perspective of authentic leaders. Next, self-determination theory is used to explain how each ethical philosophy (deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics) can be internalized as a part of an integrated authentic leader's moral identity. A critical discussion of this section is that the internalization of types of these ethical philosophies can shape the content of an authentic leader's moral identity. In addition, such moral identity can have malleable and dynamic nature. Then, an integrative framework is presented to demonstrate how these ethical philosophies can be internalized and integrated into an authentic leader's moral identity and how environmental trigger events and the domain of morality can cause reflection and activation of such moral identity in different situations. Finally, three propositions are discussed and provided about the framework that can be examined in future investigations.

Authentic Leadership and Internalized Moral Perspective

According to Walumbwa et al., (2008, p. 94), AL refers to "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development". Despite the rapid growth in investigating AL, it still needs theoretical and methodological clarification and development (Gardner & McCauley, 2022; Gardner et al., 2021; Hoch et al., 2018), including the internalized moral perspective component (e.g., Diddams & Chang, 2012; Hannah et al., 2014).

Although some have argued that the internalized moral perspective component is not required or central for conceptualizing AL (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), several AL

Fig. 1 The impact of ethical philosophies on authentic leaders' moral identity and moral processes
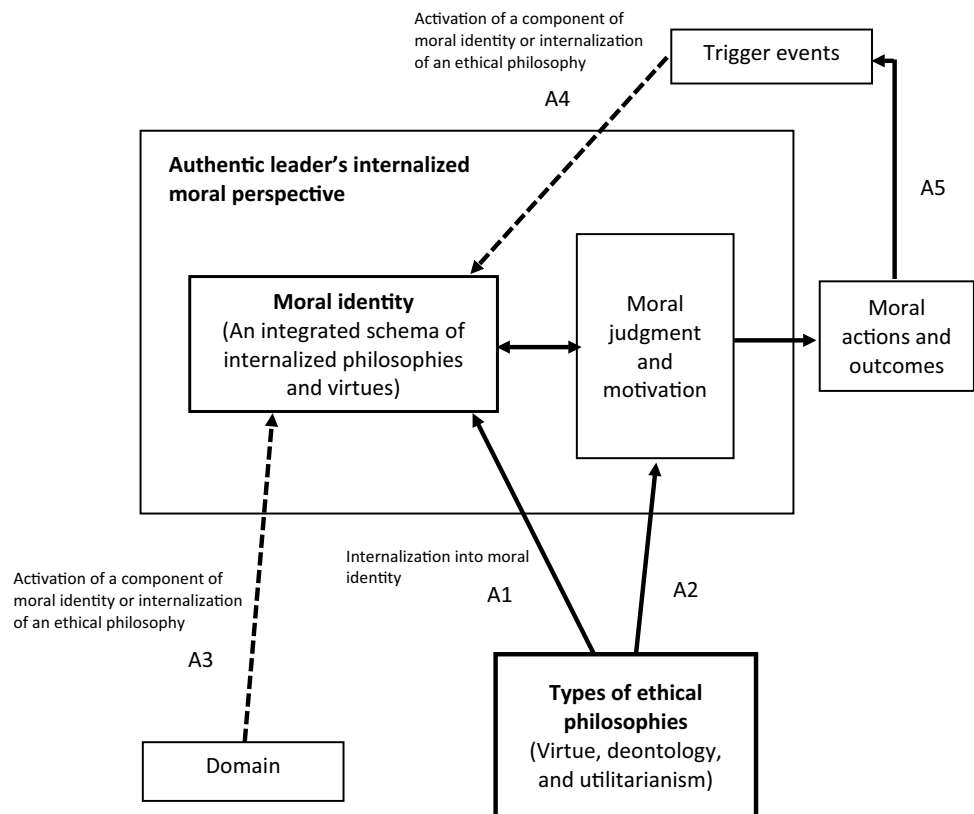
researchers consider it as the essential component of AL, theoretically and practically (e.g., Gardner et al., 2021; Hannah et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). They fundamentally argue that the primary expectation of leadership is to transform individuals into their best selves. In addition, although authenticity is worthwhile (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) for a leader, addressing moral issues of business decisions is inevitable. This paper also assumes the requirement of the moral aspect in the conceptualization of AL.

The Nature of the Internalized Moral Perspective Component of Authentic Leadership

Before addressing the issue of the internalization of ethical philosophies into authentic leaders' morality, it is necessary to review how internalized moral perspective has been conceptualized and used in the literature. After initial conceptualizations (e.g., Walumbwa et al., 2008), several authors have tried to theoretically elaborate on the nature of internalized moral perspective and develop the previous views on this component of AL. Some works have suggested new understandings of this component (e.g., Hannah et al., 2005; May et al., 2003) from the perspectives of various theoretical frameworks on moral decision-making, moral development, self-regulation mechanisms, and the moral agency perspective (Treviño et al., 2006). I start by explaining the original views, followed by a review of other approaches.

Walumbwa et al. (2008), based on the previous literature, argued that "authentic leadership includes a positive moral perspective characterized by high ethical standards that guide decision-making and behavior" (p. 92). The nature of these ethical standards in such conceptualizations seems to be a black box, whether these standards are knowledge, values, beliefs, moral identity, or other moral capacities. In addition, as mentioned earlier, another question is whether the content of such perspectives is related to a specific ethical framework or can vary for different authentic leaders. It also needs to be clarified from a normative perspective regarding how the standards can be used ethically in different contexts (Hannah et al., 2014). This ambiguity regarding the meaning of this component of AL has also impacted the measurement items developed for it. For example, measurement items developed by Walumbwa and colleagues, such as "[The leader] demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions" or "[The leader] makes decisions based on his/her core beliefs," are broadly related to an internalized ethical standard in the form of *beliefs*. However, it is unclear if these beliefs relate to specific values, moral identity, moral goals, or moral rules or virtues (e.g., courage, justice, and wisdom) (Wang & Hackett, 2020). Thus, some other approaches may be helpful to clarify this ambiguity.

May et al. (2003) used an inclusive approach to conceptualize the moral component of AL by integrating views on moral decision-making, moral efficacy, moral courage,

moral resiliency, and moral capacity. They proposed this inclusive framework for identifying ways to develop authentic leaders and generate sustainable, authentic behaviors. Although they considered some moral capabilities, they had no use of moral identity in their framework.

Authentic leaders internalized moral perspective can also be understood using the idea of moral capacity. Hannah et al. (2011), based on Rest's framework of moral processes, namely: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral action, developed a model on moral maturation and conation processes (categorizing the above processes) and required capacities. They introduced a framework on how different moral capacities (e.g., moral complexity, moral identity, and moral efficacy) influence a moral agent to engage in moral processes. For example, moral complexity (one's knowledge structure about moral issues in a specific domain) influences moral judgment, and moral identity influences both moral judgment and moral motivation processes. Of course, the outcome of moral decision-making and actions will influence the capacities. The first group, called maturation capacity, contains moral complexity, moral meta-cognitive ability, and moral identity. These capacities enable a moral agent to detect moral issues cognitively, reflect on them, and consider morality part of the individual's identity. According to Hannah et al. (2011), moral identity refers to one's self-concept regarding 'who they are about morality' and 'what ethical actions are most in line with their moral beliefs'. Hannah et al. (2011) considered moral identity an integrated moral view of self, a dynamic, malleable, complex, multidimensional, and context-specific phenomenon. Hannah et al. (2005) suggested that one can have moral sub-identities based on the social roles one plays (e.g., as a parent or a team player), which defines the structure of moral identity as a multifaceted phenomenon. Diddams and Chang (2012) consistently argued that aspects of moral identity may not be self-evident for a leader and may need to be triggered by some cues. For example, a virtue-centered authentic leader who acts based on the justice virtue may realize a situation such as facing an organizational failure that triggers the necessity of attention to utilitarianism while adhering to justice. The second group of moral capacities, conation capacities, also called moral potency (Hannah & Avolio, 2010), refer to moral ownership, moral courage, and moral efficacy. These help individuals to accept their moral responsibilities and have courage and efficacy for addressing moral issues, especially when there are obstacles and temptations to act immorally. Accordingly, an internalized moral identity may not be sufficient for an authentic leader's moral decision-making and actions, and other capacities are required. Although having a moral identity for an authentic leader is crucial, it will only impact their moral actions if sufficient moral conations capacities accompany it.

Several researchers have also described moral identity as a crucial component of an individual's morality as moral traits such as caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind (Aquino & Reed, 2002). However, Hannah et al. (2011) argued that moral identity is not a unified construct and may be multifaceted in different domains. In addition, they suggested that moral identity is a complex construct that, in addition to a perceived moral trait, can be related to moral goals, moral affections, moral motivation, and a moral-related narrative of self (Hannah et al., 2011).

Wang and Hackett (2020), in a fundamental discussion, argued that the moral identity concept must be elaborated further, and three perspectives must be distinguished when discussing this construct: moral values, moral goals, and moral virtue (e.g., courage, justice, wisdom). Based on a review of definitions conducted by Wang and Hackett, they identified 14 alternative definitions for moral identity. They argued that while several definitions refer to a moral self-view, some refer to the individual's values or moral goals rather than virtues. In addition, those values and goals refer to justice, fairness, the importance of morality, respect, and concern for others' rights and welfare. However, they argued that moral virtues are related to an individual's actual *being*. Individuals' actions can be morally virtuous not because of their obligation or a commitment to a rule or the importance of others' welfare but because of the "ongoing intent of the individual for becoming a virtuous individual" (Wang & Hackett, 2020, p. 4). Thus, they considered virtue-centered moral identity an awareness of becoming virtuous rather than paying attention to moral goals or values. This conceptualization is highly helpful regarding the goal of the present paper about the nature of ethical philosophies internalized in moral identity. Suppose the ultimate goal of internalizing ethical philosophies is to develop virtues. In that case, leaders need to practice and reflect on using these moral philosophies to achieve such virtue-based identities.

Another perspective to understanding the nature of moral identity development is from the view of self-determination theory (SDT) (Arvanitis, 2017; Diddams & Chang, 2012; Hannah et al., 2005; Krettenauer, 2020). SDT can be used to explain the internalization mechanisms of ethical philosophies into authentic leaders' moral identities. According to the literature on SDT (Deci et al., 2017; Gagné & Deci, 2005), external regulations can be internalized into types of autonomous self-regulation to form moral identity (Krettenauer, 2020): Identified regulation and integrated regulation. Identified regulation refers to self-regulation when individuals internalize the benefits of external regulations. For example, a utilitarian incentive policy can be internalized when the benefit of the policy is autonomously understood and accepted. Authentic leaders can internalize more than one ethical philosophy during different experiences and

form a unified identity that regulates their motivation based on integrated regulation. For example, an authentic leader behaves based on the justice virtue but also emphasizes utilitarianism in business decisions and employees' rights for their privacy. SDT mechanisms are used in this paper to explain how authentic leaders develop their moral identities over time by internalizing the benefits of ethical philosophies during their business experiences.

It is crucial to summarize the above reviews and clarify the conceptual definitions of the constructs to use in the discussions of the following sections. First, the term *perspective* existing in the label of the internalized moral perspective component already discussed in the literature must be clarified to convey its complex nature. Based on the literature, this component of AL seems primarily defined based on authentic living (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) of moral beliefs and values (Walumbwa et al., 2008). However, the current paper suggests that the current conceptualization needs to be developed to elaborate the meaning of this component as the core feature of AL, especially considering the advancement in the morality literature. This paper defines *the internalized moral perspective* as an authentic leader's moral-related knowledge structure, sensitivity, identity, and other moral capacities proposed by Hannah et al. (2011).

Because the internalized moral perspective may contain several components, as suggested above, this paper focuses only on the component of *moral identity* as the central construct of the paper's framework. Two reasons can justify this decision. First, moral identity has a central role among other moral capacities explained earlier due to its role in the maturation and conation processes (Hannah et al., 2011). The second reason is that the current understanding of internalized moral perspective, as the authentic leader's guide for moral actions, is more consistent with the definition of moral identity that describes individuals' self-concept and consistent behaviors with moral beliefs in different situations (Hannah et al., 2011). Considering the existing definitions (Wang & Hackett, 2020), the present paper suggests that moral identity refers to one's ongoing awareness of being moral and a self-schema of the values of morality using internalized ethical frameworks. These frameworks refer to internalized values and goals about moral concerns, including the importance of morality, fairness, respect, and attention to others' rights and welfare of others. This paper considers authentic leaders' moral identity complex, multifaceted, and malleable.

The Content of an Authentic Leader's Moral Identity Concerning Each Ethical Philosophy

As mentioned earlier, internalizing the benefits of ethical philosophies embedded in external regulations (e.g., contracts, organizational rules, and ethical codes) into moral identity is the main issue of this paper. Such internalizations can be experienced during lifetime reflections or influenced by role modeling that helps transfer the value of philosophies to individuals' moral identities.

According to Jeong and Han (2013), psychologized morality explains moral judgment and processes from psychological viewpoints without addressing the philosophical foundations behind moral reasoning. The current paper argues that while psychologized morality is worthwhile in the literature, understanding morality needs a dialogue between the two disciplines of moral psychology and ethical philosophy (Jeong & Han, 2013). Some papers (e.g., Arvanitis, 2017; Jeong & Han, 2013) have argued that even some pioneers in moral psychology, such as Kohlberg, initially elaborated their philosophical views on ethics and then developed their moral development frameworks from psychological views.

Wang and Hackett (2020) reviewed various definitions of moral identity to identify a definition consistent with virtue-centered moral identity and provided a definition supporting their new conceptualization. Each definition identified by Wang and Hackett (2020) seems rooted in an ethical framework. For example, Blasi's (1984) definition emphasizes the awareness of being moral and fair, which can be related to the ethical philosophies of virtue and the internalization of deontology, as will be explained later. In addition, Moshman's (2005) definition emphasizes respect and concern for others' rights and welfare, which may arguably be associated with deontology and rule utilitarianism.

Looking at individuals' preferences and attitudes toward such ethical views, sometimes called ethical predisposition/ideology, has a history in the psychological literature (Jennings et al., 2015). For example, several studies have measured such ethical preferences and compared these moral views across different groups (e.g., Brady & Wheeler, 1996; Conway & Gawronski, 2013; Fok et al., 2016; Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Love et al., 2020; Paik et al., 2019; Treviño et al., 2006). Few publications in the AL literature have addressed the internalized forms of some ethical philosophies, especially virtue ethics (e.g., Hannah et al., 2005; Sendjaya et al., 2016a, 2016b).

In line with previous works, Hannah et al. (2005) similarly suggested that virtue and altruism are helpful to be incorporated into the conceptualization of authentic leaders' moral identity. Wang and Hacket (2020) also explicitly referred to the three philosophies of ethics: deontology, teleology (unilateralism), and virtue ethics, and developed the idea of virtue-centered moral identity, which can also be used for leadership contexts. Although Wang and Hacket (2020) linked the idea of virtue ethics to moral identity and virtuous leadership, there seem to be no other papers that explicitly discuss the possible relevancy of other ethical philosophies and moral identity to leadership, specifically AL.

Figure 2 demonstrates the integration of such internalizations of rule utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics that form a virtue-based moral identity of authentic leaders. This model is elaborated in the following sub-sections. First, the paper briefly reviews how the internalization of each ethical philosophy can impact a leader's moral identity. Next, I argue how these internalized philosophies can be integrated. Finally, the paper discusses that authentic leaders' moral identities result from their reflections on real-world experiences and self-cultivation over time.

Deontology and Authentic Leaders' Moral Identity

Leaders whose moral identity incorporates the internalized deontological philosophy see themselves as individuals acting according to their moral duties and obligations. These obligations must be perceived as deep and should not be ordinary but autonomously internalized to be considered a moral identity (Arvanitis, 2017; Dare, 2016). As an ethical philosophy, deontology focuses on the right actions (Lemoine et al., 2019). However, anyone can internalize the values of rules of this framework psychologically within different institutional settings during their lifetime, which form parts of the individual's moral identity.

Instead of giving importance to the results and utility, deontology gives importance to the means and the action itself to judge the morality of the action. This philosophy, highly influenced by Immanuel Kant, considers morality an utterly rational process and emphasizes the universality of moral rules (Graham, 2004; Immanuel & Gregor, 1996). Kant emphasized that such moral actions and obligations should be with good will, also called good character (Immanuel & Gregor, 1996). According to Kant, good will is based on the individual's autonomy as a basis of morality
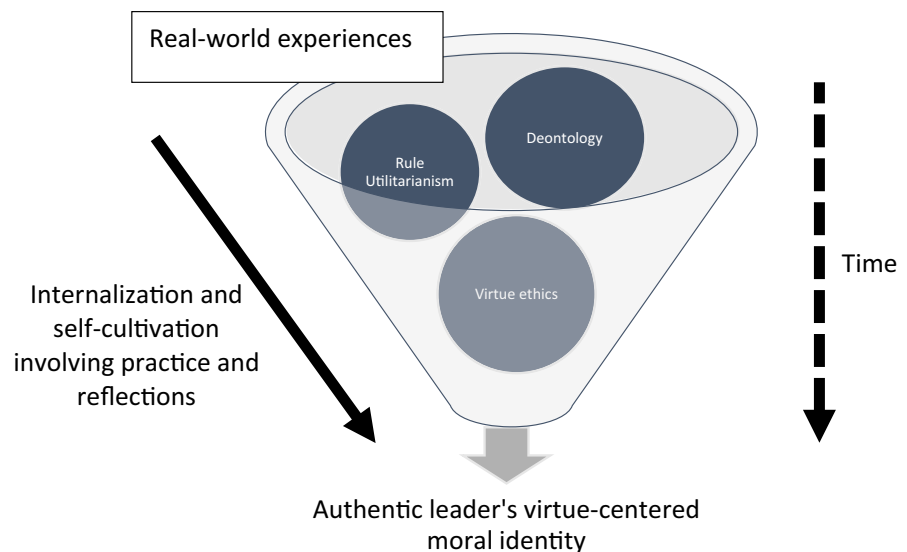
(Immanuel & Gregor, 1996). Moreover, Kant emphasizes that individuals with dignity have infinite value and cannot be seen merely as means.

The current paper argues that Kantian deontology can also be a part of an authentic leader's moral identity, influencing followers' perceptions of the leader's authenticity and moral perspective. Given the emphasis on the autonomy of the moral actor and their good will when acting based on an obligation, such morality is consistent with the conceptualization of authenticity in autonomous actions (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). In addition, this morality respects individuals with dignity and sees them with unlimited price can be consistent with the relational transparency in AL when other individuals are considered human beings who must be treated with respect and full attention (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

As a part of a normative view of deontological morality, for example, *justice* is considered a rule (Micewski & Troy, 2007). According to this framework, an action is moral if it pays attention to justice and the distribution of benefits and costs among responsible individuals in a fair manner (Schumann, 2001). Although justice is a fundamental moral concept, it can be elaborated in terms of different views such as individuals' performance, potentials, or capabilities (e.g., when sharing a profit), equal share, or even based on their actual needs (Schumann, 2001). Employees' perception of their leader's fairness is essential for creating a culture of trust and security and, thus, can be related to AL. However, how individuals define justice using the different criteria described above impacts the content of their moral identity.

Deontology has some criticisms and limitations (Singer, 2011), such as its rigidity and the lack of attention to consequences, which may also influence an individual's moral identity. Such internalized rules may conflict in situations

Fig. 2 How authentic leaders internalize ethical philosophies over time by practice and reflection in the real world to develop a virtue-centered moral identity

Real-world experiences

Rule Utilitarianism

Deontology

Virtue ethics

Internalization and self-cultivation involving practice and reflections

Time

Authentic leader's virtue-centered moral identity

requiring the individual to give weight to them. For example, when the rule of honesty and giving importance to human life become one's obligations simultaneously, it causes a challenging situation. In addition, practicing such obligations and rules may not be automatic and cause cognitive struggles and fatigue, as with any other self-regulation mechanism. This state contrasts with virtues that cause automatic reactions because of their highly internalized habits in one's character (Lemoine et al., 2019). Despite such criticisms and different views, several thinkers and researchers still consider Kantian views crucial for understanding morality's rationale (Graham, 2004; Immanuel & Gregor, 1996). Internalizing deontology and emphasizing some rules, such as justice and employees' rights with good will, can also guide an authentic leader in moral issues, consistent with the definition of internalized moral perspective discussed in the literature.

Utilitarianism and Authentic Leaders' Moral Identity

The literature on the different types of utilitarianism and criticisms of it is vast (Graham, 2004), but the utilitarianism philosophy is shortly reviewed here to argue that it may also impact forming a leader's moral identity. This section argues that internalizing some forms of it, especially rule utilitarianism, may have the potentials to be considered a part of an authentic leader's moral identity.

Identifying utilitarian views is inevitable in business, considering the cruciality of the business outcomes (e.g., profitability, productivity, promotability) for different stakeholders (Brady & Wheeler, 1996; Letwin et al., 2016). Because of the nature of business and how business success is defined by its outcomes, business leaders may need to internalize the value of utilitarianism in natural business transactions. Similarly, Cureton (2015), in the context of public morality, criticized the pure Kantian view on the importance of rules and rights without paying attention to utilitarianism which is more insightful for real everyday business contexts. Cureton specifically suggested paying more attention to rule utilitarianism, which can bridge the rule philosophies with real and practical activities. Paik et al. (2019) acknowledged this issue and identified that Korean managers, as a result of continuous partnership with US managers, have gradually adopted rule utilitarianism over time, which is also influenced by Korean government policies in terms of considering social responsibility, human rights, and environmental issues in their business utilitarian decisions and initiatives. From this perspective, conceptualizing AL and its internalized moral perspective without discussing its negative or positive relevancy to utilitarianism seems to be a substantial theoretical limitation.

In the philosophy literature, utilitarianism, initially raised by Jeremey Bentham in the eighteenth century, justifies an action that maximizes happiness and the well-being of all affected individuals (Graham, 2004). The literature has divided it into act and rule utilitarianism (Hooker, 2000). Act utilitarianism, like the original version, emphasizes the net utility in terms of the greatest happiness and the least pain for the greatest number of individuals in that situation. An individual with this morality has no attention to means, which is acknowledged as a critical limitation of this morality. This state is critical because such individuals may commit serious unethical actions by justifying them as ethical (Gong, 2010).

It can be understandable that the moral identity based on the act utilitarianism framework may not be perceived as consistent with AL because relying only on the utility and justifying the means by the end is perceived as unethical (Letwin et al., 2016; Sendjaya et al., 2016a, 2016b). In business contexts, an example may be Steve Jobs, who was reported and perceived as a utilitarian manager with deceptive strategies. However, he changed his way in the second period of his executive role at Apple. Some have reported that he used to convince others of a goal even if it required hiding or twisting some critical facts that were expected to be shared, considering others' rights to be aware of them (Smith, 2019).

In the research field, Letwin et al. (2016), in the context of 117 employee-supervisor-manager triads, researched the relationships between utilitarian and deontological (attention to rules such as others' rights) views and ethical leadership. They found that from the perspectives of both employees and managers, supervisors' utilitarianism was negatively related to supervisors' ethical leadership, while the deontological view was positively related to ethical leadership. In contrast, Conway and Gawronski (2013) argued that past studies of utilitarianism and deontology had considered these as a dichotomy in theory and measurement. They designed a study where the inclination to utilitarianism and deontology may co-exist. Conway and Gawronski found that inclination to utilitarianism was related to moral identity in terms of individuals' concerns for some moral rules such as honesty, generosity, and helpfulness. Conway and Gawronski proposed that this relationship suggests that utilitarianism may partially and, in some contexts, is perceived to be related to genuine concerns for morality. This perception may be due to facing situations that reduce concerns over causing harm. For example, a leader committed to overcoming the business barriers that have caused customers' dissatisfaction, a dramatic reduction in employees' income, and reduced profits for shareholders may be perceived as having moral concerns and as an authentic leader. In contrast, their moral identity may be based on utilitarianism.

Rule utilitarianism was suggested to overcome the unethical issues associated with act utilitarianism. According to the literature (Hooker, 2000), rule utilitarianism emphasizes

that moral actors must follow moral rules such as honesty, privacy, or respecting human rights while relying on utilitarianism. Using this framework, an action based on utilitarianism is moral as it conforms to moral rules and obligations. Despite the advantages of this framework, Diggs (1964) argued that, from a philosophical perspective, there must be caution when choosing rules, and "good rules" must be chosen. Otherwise, for instance, by choosing instrumental rules that leave no autonomy for the actor, rule utilitarianism has no moral benefit compared with act utilitarianism. Dare (2016) also emphasized that rules should be based on a deep obligation, not ordinary obligations that add no moral value to utilitarianism.

Another critical point to consider forms of utilitarianism as a part of moral identity is the criticism regarding the importance of moral agency in moral issues. Some (e.g., Tiedemann, 2021) have argued that utilitarianism is an agent-neutral moral view and sees moral issues as observers. If this is the case, it may be challenging to consider it as a candidate for a type of moral identity when there is no moral agency. However, this paper argues that individuals can internalize the utilitarian framework into their moral identities and act with moral agency. First, moral identity can be related to one's self-concept about oneself, others, and the context. An individual with a utilitarian view may also be a moral agent with a moral concern (Conway & Gawronski, 2013). Of course, one can use the utilitarian framework only as an observer, but this does not imply that this individual has no moral intention or agency to act morally from a psychological view. Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), even a utilitarian individual can have intentionality for acting on a moral issue but with a different view, prioritizing the net benefits considering the costs. In addition, if leaders specifically internalize the rule utilitarianism into their moral identities, the *leader* is conceptually considered an agency that seeks to maximize utility while being committed to a rule such as respecting others' rights or treating others fairly.

This paper proposes that business leaders can internalize forms of rule utilitarianism into their moral identity. This moral identity can be viewed as associated with AL because of commitment to some rules (e.g., honesty, others' rights, commitment to the law) while paying attention to utilitarianism as an ethical framework for business functioning. These utilitarian identities may also be perceived as consistent with AL because of the nature of the issue when a leader tries to reduce harm to stakeholders, as suggested by Conway and Gawronski (2013). Authentic leaders with the content of rule utilitarian internalized into moral identity may describe themselves simply as: "I am an individual who addresses the organization's moral issues concerning maximizing the net utility for the organization's stakeholders as much as possible, while committed to moral duties (e.g., fairness, honesty, law)."

Virtue Ethics and Authentic Leaders' Moral Identity

Virtue-based ethics has been a critical ethical philosophy for a long time, and it goes back to Aristotle and Confucius (Hursthouse, 1999). However, it has recently influenced moral psychology and leadership (Hackett & Wang, 2012; Wang & Hackett, 2020). Briefly speaking, according to Wang and Hackett (2020, p.2), "virtues are character traits and dispositions, which collectively comprise 'excellent' character, some of which relate directly to leadership". For example, courage, temperance, justice, prudence, humanity, care, and truthfulness have been repeatedly acknowledged as crucial virtues, especially for leaders (Hannah et al., 2005; Wang & Hackett, 2020). According to MacIntyre (1984), virtues are those dispositions based on individuals' self-knowledge, enabling them to maintain certain moral practices and helping them hinder the influence of temptations or distractions when facing moral difficulties. This characteristic gives the virtue view a strong potential for conceptualizing the moral aspect of AL due to its emphasis on *being* a moral actor and consistency in being moral. Virtues are deliberate and consciously developed habits that are gradually formed, especially during a crisis (Byrne et al., 2018). The virtue ethics approach is normative but deviates from rule-based ethics and emphasizes a holistic approach toward being moral (Koehn, 1998). Although it is usually called a unified philosophy, it refers to different types, such as care, agent-based, and eudaimonia-oriented virtue ethics (Hursthouse, 1999). Some moral theories also proposed that from a psychological perspective, women are more oriented to engage in moral development based on *care* and *altruism*. At the same time, men are more oriented toward moral development based on justice (Gilligan, 1993). Thus, virtues may mean different things to different people.

Self-cultivation is a necessary process that people may use to internalize such virtues till they become habitual characters (Wang & Hackett, 2020). In addition, leaders may support individuals in understanding and being inspired by the value of such virtues and exercising such virtues in different circumstances (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

According to virtue ethics, an action is ethical if the actor is identified with such virtues. Otherwise, the action is unethical (Schumann, 2001). For example, ignoring colleagues' constructive ideas in group decision-making is unethical, not because of its impact on the results or *ends*, but because it contradicts the virtue of fairness and truthfulness. Virtues can become crucial components of an authentic leader, and such character strengths can provide psychological resources for authentic leaders to practice moral

leadership and create positive outcomes (Hackett & Wang, 2012; Hannah et al., 2005).

Similarly, Ladkin (2006), based on Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy, proposed the dwelling approach. She explained that deontology and utilitarianism have deficiencies in handling moral dilemmas for organizational leaders. According to Ladkin, these two are rules rather than a relational and contextual way of being. She proposed that the dwelling approach is more consistent with the virtue view than deontology and utilitarianism. Ladkin argued that addressing moral issues in leadership requires leaders to have two key considerations: defining the issue within the context and seeing the issue and the solutions as relational phenomena. She criticized the current moral reasoning as too objective and rational, ignoring the impacts of contextual and relational aspects of moral issues in understanding the true meaning of organizational dilemmas. Based on an ethical dilemma described in her paper, Ladkin explained how creating an open, truthful, and relational approach with the individuals affected by a decision can enrich the understanding of the moral issue and identify an effective solution. She argued that deontological and utilitarian approaches were inadequate for solving that ethical dilemma in that specific scenario. She proposed the concept of dwelling as a state that the moral actor can develop relationships with other individuals to resolve the issue based on the meaning of the issue in that specific context. Leaders with such moral identity can describe themselves as individuals with concerns for understanding individuals affected by their actions. Subsequently, they try to grasp the meaning of those individuals' problems by interacting with their viewpoints, enabling leaders to identify relational and context-based solutions. These ideas are consistent with AL and its morality. Authentic leaders are expected to create transparent relationships during the leadership process and use balance processing to pay attention to others' views (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

The main advantage of the virtue framework being related to AL is that it directly focuses on the *actor,* not the *action* (Hursthouse, 1999). However, some criticisms are acknowledged for virtue ethics (Begley, 2005; Koehn, 1998), including its inadequacy for moral actions, especially in complex situations. From a normative perspective, there may be situations when authentic leaders need to prioritize the values of their virtues based on the moral dilemma or the context. They may even need more domain knowledge of the issue while having the virtue. Such issues also highlight how one integrates virtues (e.g., honesty, justice, temperance) into an integrated moral identity.

Can internalized Ethical Philosophies be Integrated into an Authentic Leader's Moral Identity?

This question is critical because some may believe that the internalizations of different ethical philosophies and frameworks cannot be integrated into any coherent moral identity or that AL is only related to virtue ethics. Lemoine et al. (2019) argued that although ethical leadership, AL, and servant leadership are shared in their concerns for ethical aspects of business, their philosophical foundations differ. They proposed that ethical leadership is more consistent with deontology, servant leadership with utilitarianism, and AL is related to virtue ethics. The main argument is that only virtue ethics focuses on the moral actor. The two other ethical philosophies are more related to moral reasoning than how the moral agency is autonomously moral. In addition, they argued that because servant leadership deals with the morality of interactions with different stakeholders concerning their needs, it is more related to utilitarianism. In addition, ethical leadership, due to its emphasis on moral norms and standards, is more related to deontology. The ideas proposed by Lemoine et al. (2019) are highly significant in linking philosophical aspects of morality to relevant leadership theories. In addition, based on the literature on AL, the current paper supports that the virtue framework is the most relevant philosophy to AL as it emphasizes the role of the moral actor and agency.

However, the current paper proposes that the categorization proposed by Lemoine et al. (2019) makes sense if ethical philosophies such as utilitarianism and deontology are considered only philosophical and cognitive frameworks or rules for moral reasoning. As proposed earlier, the benefits of ethical philosophies such as rule utilitarianism and deontology can also be autonomously internalized into the leaders' moral identity that regulates their moral motivation and actions, not as ethical frameworks outside leaders.

The above idea is consistent with the notion suggesting that even virtue morality roots in the development and internalization of deontology and having practiced it till it becomes a habit (Louden, 1986). Louden argued that even Kant's view was not merely focusing on rules but was a beginning of internalization and the agency's use of the rules in practice. Integrating all of Kant's works and emphasizing that virtue ethics completes deontology, Dierksmeier (2013, p. 603) also argued that "One needs both a moral vision of the world at the large and seasoned judgment. Only through the combined effects of both can one fit one's actions coherently to one another and adapt them adequately to the respective situational context".

Similar arguments exist for the connection between utilitarianism and virtue ethics. According to Russell (2013) in the *Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, virtues are essential for using utilitarianism to generate goods for

others, as virtues moderate how utilitarianism is used. For example, when a company must lay off some employees for the greatest good of the greatest number of employees, customers, and shareholders, an authentic leader with care and compassion virtues tries to do so by generating alternatives. Such virtue-centered authentic leaders may try to identify jobs for those employees before the layoff, have a conversation with them to exchange ideas on finding some alternatives, and provide consulting activities to help them cope with the situation. Thus, having such an autonomous internalized moral identity based on utilitarianism or deontology may not necessarily contradict the importance of virtue ethics in AL, but it is complementary. An authentic leader may possess an integrated moral identity based on virtues such as integrity while having an identity based on the autonomous acceptance of the value of human rights and a type of utilitarianism that considers environmental issues. This paper proposes that the distinction here is that internalizing an external regulation can make it a part of self-identity. Lemoine et al. (2019) considered utilitarianism and deontology only as rules for moral reasoning while neglecting that these external regulations can also be autonomously internalized and become a part of one's moral identity.

Although the question of what internalized moral philosophies can be integrated to form an authentic leader's moral identity can also be explored in empirical research, the idea can be discussed theoretically. For example, deontology and rule utilitarianism can be consistent in one's moral identity due to their emphasis on ethical rules (e.g., rights and justice). These can also be integrated with virtues, as rules can be transformed into virtues if they are deeply internalized through practice and persistence.

As demonstrated earlier in Fig. 2, different ethical philosophies can be internalized into a leader's moral identity during the leader's lifetime and be used and integrated within various work and life experiences. Such experiences may be completed by reflections on the leader's moral identity. In addition, they may result in a virtue-center moral identity as a result of causing internalized habitual beings. As mentioned earlier, the same process will impact the authentic leader's virtues in the future. Not all virtues entirely and simultaneously exist in the moral identity of an authentic leader. The authentic leader's moral identity may be based on integrating only some virtues in addition to the internalized value of some ethical philosophies, still developing or under mental reflection.

Figure 2 also shows that although different ethical philosophies can be internalized and integrated into an authentic leader's moral identity, the ultimate goal is to develop a virtue-center authentic leader who has deeply internalized such frameworks and activates them when necessary. In this regard, Railton (2003) stated: "One cannot properly judge actions by their outcomes alone. The motive from which an act is performed is independently important and makes a distinctive contribution to moral assessment not only of the actor but of the action. Moreover, suppose morality is to achieve a secure place in individual lives and social practices. In that case, agents must develop firm characters to guide their choices and to provide others with a stable basis of expectation and trust. Any sensible moral theory, therefore, must give a central role to the encouragement and possession of a virtuous character." (p. 226).

An Integrative Theoretical Framework of Authentic Leaders' Internalization and Activation of Ethical Philosophies

This section mainly addresses the third question of the paper: "How do internalized ethical philosophies as a part of moral identity regulate an authentic leader's moral behavior, and how do authentic leaders activate them in different situations?". The theoretical framework of the study presented in Fig. 1 and propositions discussed in the following sections are used for answering the third question, elaborating on the internalization and activation of ethical philosophies. It must be acknowledged that the whole picture of the AL process must contain influence mechanisms of how authentic leaders impact followers' moral identity and behaviors. However, considering the primary goal of this paper, the framework proposes only the detailed mechanisms of the authentic leader's moral perspectives, not the whole leadership influence process, including the role of followers (Hannah et al., 2005).

Before providing some specific propositions, the framework depicted in Fig. 1 is reviewed here. As mentioned earlier, the central assumption of this framework is that moral identity is an integrated, complex, and malleable schema of one's self-concept of morality (Hannah et al., 2011). Thus, an authentic leader's moral identity contains the leader's self-view as a moral agency on how the leader can be motivated to handle moral issues and dilemmas. For example, an authentic leader's central aspect of moral identity may be the leader's virtue of care. However, given the leader's past knowledge and experiences, the benefits of other ethical philosophies, such as rule utilitarianism, could have also been internalized into the leader's moral identity. Another alternative is that an authentic leader integrates rule utilitarianism with virtue so that the consequence of actions is evaluated by virtues (Russell, 2013). Such *internalizations* in past experiences impact the leader's moral identity (A1). In addition, authentic leaders may autonomously intend to enter a reflection process and internalize the value of the alternative ethical framework into their moral identities (Hannah et al., 2011).

This paper focuses on the moral identity construct as the center of the framework. However, being familiar with

ethical philosophies as knowledge may also impact the leader's moral judgment (A2). Such knowledge can influence the leader's cognitive structure by increasing the leader's understanding of different perspectives on assessing a moral issue (Hannah et al., 2011). In addition, subject domains (A3) and trigger events (A4) influence the activation and internalization mechanisms. When changing a subject domain, an authentic leader may internalize or activate a different ethical framework consistent with the domain. For example, in one domain, the justice virtue is activated; in another, rule utilitarianism is internalized or activated. Trigger events such as a failure in our actions or environmental changes may make authentic leaders reflect on their moral identity and the possibility of using other ethical philosophies. According to the framework, authentic leaders decide and act on moral issues based on their moral identities. Finally, as the results of some actions, outcomes such as performance, employees' and customers' reactions, and board members' reactions may also trigger the internalization of a new ethical philosophy or activate a pre-existing component of moral identity based on another ethical framework (A5).

Internalization of the Benefits of Ethical Philosophies into an Authentic Leader's Moral Identity

After briefly reviewing the framework, based on discussions provided in previous sections, this section provides propositions as avenues for further empirical investigations. From the perspective of organismic integrating theory as a mini theory of SDT (Deci et al., 2017), internalizing the benefits of such ethical philosophies as external motivational mechanisms embedded in organizational and other institutional settings (Jennings et al., 2015; Krettenauer, 2020; Paik et al., 2019) can influence the leader's moral identity. More specifically, the *identified* and *integrated regulations* proposed by this theory can help explain this phenomenon (Deci et al., 2017). An authentic leader's moral behaviors may result from autonomous motivational regulations based on the internalized ethical philosophies into moral identity. Some mechanisms may provide information that an ethical framework can help the leader act morally in a specific situation, such as a leader's reflections on the benefits of an ethical framework and practicing a framework in real business issues. These mechanisms may trigger an autonomous internalization of the ethical philosophy. In addition, interacting with senior leaders as role models may also play a role in such internalization by enhancing social learning (Brown & Treviño, 2006) of the benefits of ethical philosophies in handling business moral issues in different situations.

It seems that literature on the moral aspect of AL has mostly recognized virtue-centered moral identity (Wang & Hackett, 2020) and care and altruistic moral identity (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017; Hannah et al., 2005; Wang & Hackett, 2020). As mentioned earlier, this paper suggests that the benefits of other ethical philosophies, such as rule utilitarianism, can also be autonomously internalized over time to form a leader's moral identity. From this perspective, even when a leader autonomously internalizes the rule utilitarianism framework for reducing harm to others (Arvanitis, 2017; Conway & Gawronski, 2013) (e.g., a leader who is committed to reducing the injustice for all stakeholders of the company) may be perceived as an authentic leader.

As a counterfactual argument, if there is no experience of such internalization during past experiences, leaders would have no opportunity to develop their moral identity, as such identities are the outcome of integrating different values and self-understanding. Having no experience in such internalization also hinders individuals from developing self-understanding because of having no information on their performance outcomes and reflections on their moral actions, which are required to develop moral identity. External regulations are usually based on ethical philosophies such as act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism, or right ethics based on institutional norms and regulations. Without such internalization mechanisms, individuals cannot relate the value of external moral regulations to any of their internal values. Thus, the above arguments can be used to propose the following statement:

Proposition 1: *Authentic leaders' moral identity is associated with their past experiences of internalizing the benefits of ethical philosophies such as deontology and rule utilitarianism into the leader's moral identity.*

Reflecting on the Current Moral Identity and Activating the Value of Ethical Philosophies

Authentic leaders may face a challenging situation that requires them to reflect on their moral identity. A complicated question is: 'what do authentic leaders do based on one of these internalized philosophies if this aspect of their moral identity does not help resolve the moral issues they face in a particular business context?' For example, suppose a leader with a strong and autonomous commitment to fairness emphasizes that employees should be treated fairly based on their needs. However, in a challenging situation, the authentic leader realizes that some company's high-performer employees decide to leave because they think the leader has no appreciation for their considerable and unique accomplishments. They expect merit-based fairness, while the leader authentically believes in needs-based morality and acts based on it. This challenge may make the authentic leader reflect on the moral identity already developed and its sufficiency to handle the new situation. They may choose to re-evaluate the situation from the viewpoints of other

ethical philosophies that can be internalized or activated if it is already internalized into moral identity. This situation requires considerable reflection (Shadnam, 2020).

There are examples of how business leaders have changed their morality over time or activated a different ethical view because of moral reflexivity. In this paper, the example of Howard Schultz, the founder and former CEO of Starbucks, is briefly reviewed and discussed. He stepped down as CEO in 2000 but returned as the chief executive in 2008. Howard Schultz has emphasized authenticity and morality in his leadership (Schultz & Gordon, 2012). He may also be perceived as an altruistic and ethical leader by some people because of his leadership style and his way of self-expression and actions on some moral and social issues, including providing health insurance, stock options, and tuition reimbursement for every full-time and part-time employee at Starbucks (IvyPanda, 2020; Torres, 2021). Of course, there have also been some criticisms of his approaches to politics in media and marketing practices from a cross-cultural perspective (Rippin & Fleming, 2006). Based on the literature, his moral identity may be interpreted as someone with a caring *and altruistic virtue-centered moral identity*. He has repeatedly emphasized the importance of such actions based on his morality for the welfare of employees, customers, and society. For example, he had transparently mentioned that his morality came from his life experiences when he grew up in a family with financial complications and insurance problems. It seems that these experiences have helped him develop such care-based morality for employees. He not only expressed himself as a self-made businessman regarding financial success, but he stressed that his life experiences had impacted his thoughts about life, leadership, and morality. He also expressed that being vulnerable by publicly apologizing for mistakes, such as selling the Seattle Supersonics basketball team in 2006, is essential for leaders because they must be ready to accept their moral mistakes and correct their morality accordingly. He expressed his morality related to care, ultraism, and social welfare. However, when he was asked in an interview with CNN (Stracqualursi, 2019) why not going to implement the same insurance plan used in Starbucks for all Americans if he decided to run for the US presidency, he replied differently. He mentioned that although this kind of care policy is consistent with his moral goal, this action for running the country is not affordable financially for the United States and causes other harms to the insurance industry and people in different aspects of their lives. It seems that his response can be interpreted as although the altruistic-centered morality is knowingly desirable and is consistent with his moral identity, considering the economic limitations and budget issues at the national level, this action is not ethical. This may be an example of reflection on moral identity and shifting from care ethics to a utilitarian view due to the change in the domain of morality.

An essential part of the theoretical framework presented in Fig. 1 is that authentic leaders go forth and back between their own moral identity and new alternatives using their moral reflections (Hannah et al., 2011) on the adequacy of their moral identity. During this process, authentic leaders can realize if any other ethical philosophies may be helpful in a specific situation. Koehn (1998, p. 499) consistently stated: "…what we can say is that the more virtuous persons are, the more they will move back and forth between their intuitions and their philosophies, taking into account the objections of other people and modifying their positions over time".

Thus, because of trigger events and changing the subject domain, authentic leaders with a particular moral identity may reflect on their moral identity given the situation. They may activate other parts of their moral identity to assess if other possible ethical philosophies already internalized into their moral identity can address ethical issues that the leader faces. There may also be a chance that they will internalize a new ethical philosophy that might be more helpful than the previous morality. This issue is also consistent with balanced processing (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008), which refers to a self-regulation mechanism of authentic leaders that emphasizes their openness to new ideas, challenges, and feedback, making them reflect on their ideas and morality. Based on the above arguments and examples for the illustration of the arguments, the following propositions are presented:

Proposition 2: *An authentic leader may activate a different ethical philosophy as a component of moral identity consistent with the new situation*, *which differs from the central part of moral identity after facing a trigger event or a moral issue in a different moral domain*.

Proposition 3: *An authentic leader may internalize a new ethical philosophy*, *which may seem compatible with the new situation*, *after facing a trigger event or a moral issue in a different moral domain*.

Conclusion and Future Research

Since the inception of AL as a concept, researchers have aimed to expand its theoretical foundations and assess its empirical validity (Gardner et al., 2011; Hoch et al., 2018). One central aspect of this endeavor has been the conceptual development of the internalized moral perspective, which has been acknowledged as a central component of AL (May et al., 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Despite advances in understanding this component, most empirical studies have relied on the original conceptualization and

measurement approaches (Gardner et al., 2021; Hannah et al., 2014).

This paper posits that this component of AL requires a more comprehensive conceptualization incorporating the internalization of ethical philosophies. It proposes that ethical philosophies embedded in institutional business settings can be internalized into authentic leaders' moral identities and regulate their moral motivation and behaviors. Additionally, the paper suggests that in addition to virtue and altruism already discussed in the literature on AL (Hannah et al., 2005), rule utilitarianism, deontology, and dwelling can potentially become components of an authentic leader's moral identity. This paper is also significant because of its interdisciplinary approach (Greenwood & Freeman, 2017) to link ethical philosophy and psychology in proposing ideas for understanding the moral aspects of AL and how they face business-related moral issues in different contexts.

Furthermore, the paper argues that even for an authentic leader with a well-developed and internalized moral identity, contextual factors may necessitate re-examination and revision of their moral identity. This process may involve activating a non-central aspect of their moral identity or internalizing a new ethical philosophy. Reflections on moral identity and ethical philosophies may be necessary in such cases. As such, authentic leaders may need ongoing self-reflection and exploration to fully comprehend and navigate these challenges. This view may be an approach to address the criticism of the arbitrary conceptualization of morality in the leadership literature by ignoring the role of the content of morality in leadership (Hannah et al., 2014).

There are several ways to continue this line of inquiry in addition to examining the propositions provided in the paper. First, while examining the internalization of different ethical philosophies discussed in this paper, it is also interesting to examine which ethical philosophy can be easier to internalize and what factors are essential for internalizing each ethical philosophy. These issues may be essential for leadership development practices. Second, it may be helpful to investigate what ethical philosophies are more compatible in forming an integrated moral identity. As mentioned earlier, there may be inconsistencies between act utilitarianism and deontology, while virtue ethics may be necessary for using utilitarianism in business issues. Identifying consistent aspects of authentic leaders' moral identities concerning internalized ethical philosophies may help understand why authentic leaders act differently in different circumstances. In addition, this understanding may provide insights for designing the morality content of leadership development programs. Next, exploring what ethical philosophies authentic leaders perceive to be associated with different domains of moral issues and trigger events is helpful. For example,

concerning the domain issue, the authentic leader's moral identity based on rule utilitarianism may be activated when designing contracts with business partners. Nevertheless, when handling a conflict between organizational units, the virtue of justice may be more valued. Regarding the impact of trigger events, it is worthwhile to explore what trigger events can activate the utilitarian components of an authentic leader's moral identity. This aspect of moral identity may motivate authentic leaders to pay more attention to outcome performance, which can be perceived as a success factor for authentic leaders from others' perspectives in some social contexts (Iszatt-White et al., 2019). Then, it is essential to investigate the contextual factors that may facilitate or hinder the formation of internalized moral perspectives and adopt new ethical philosophies. Studying the influence mechanisms of these contextual factors is crucial for both theoretical and practical purposes, particularly in understanding the developmental journey of authentic leaders and their ability to reflect on their morality and develop an autonomous moral identity. Finally, considering the role of mindfulness and self-reflection in the internalization process, autonomous regulation, and forming prosociality (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013; Rupprechtet al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2021) and authentic functioning (Leroy et al., 2013), future research can address how mindfulness and self-reflection can impact the development of authentic leaders' moral identities. Especially authentic leaders' self-reflection on the adequacy of ethical philosophies internalized during their work experiences may provide them with new views on challenging moral issues. Quantitative and qualitative research methods could address the proposed research goals, though qualitative research may provide a more context-based understanding of the phenomenon.

Declarations

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