

NECESSARY EVILS AND INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

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In order to produce a beneficial result, professionals must sometimes cause harm to another human being. To capture this phenomenon, we introduce the construct of “necessary evils” and explore the inherent challenges such tasks pose for those who must perform them. Whereas previous research has established the importance of treating victims of necessary evils with interpersonal sensitivity, we focus on the challenges performers face when attempting to achieve this prescribed standard in practice.

Professionals must sometimes do harm in order to do good. They must inflict physical or emotional pain on another human being in order to benefit that person, someone else, an organization, or society. Tasks that require people to do harm in the pursuit of good are a ubiquitous, albeit disconcerting, part of professional work. We use the term *necessary evil* to refer to these work-related tasks in which an individual must, as part of his or her job, perform an act that causes emotional or physical harm to another human being in the service of achieving some perceived greater good or purpose.

Although layoffs are the most prevalent and widely researched example of necessary evils in the management field (Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990; Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt, & O'Malley, 1987; Cameron, Freeman, & Mishra, 1993; Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Thibault, 2000), examples of emotionally charged interpersonal encounters abound across the professions. Social workers and clinical psychologists are called on to deliver “tough love” to substance abuse clients (Ruden, 2000), health care workers must perform physically painful procedures on patients (Halpern, 2001; Lief & Fox, 1963), teach-

ers must disappoint their students with negative feedback about important assignments (Jedrey, 1994; Palmer, 1998), managers must deliver bad news (Lee, 1993), and police officers must regularly evict people from their homes (Muir, 1979). In all cases, performers of necessary evils must knowingly and intentionally cause pain and suffering as part of the requirements of their professional positions.

Research on procedural and interactional justice has documented the wide range of benefits that accrue to individuals, groups, and organizations when necessary evils are performed in an interpersonally sensitive manner—behavior that attends to a person’s needs, rights, and feelings (Bies, 2001; Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Donovan, Drasgow, & Munson, 1998; Mikula, Petrik, & Tanzer, 1990). What has received little attention, however, is the challenge performers face when attempting to produce interpersonally sensitive behavior (Folger & Skarlicki, 2001), especially where it is most critical: when one is harming another human being. To address this gap in organizational research and theory, in this article we offer a systematic account of the psychological challenges individuals encounter when performing necessary evils, the various factors that generate and shape that psychological experience, and the influence that psychological experience has on the likelihood of producing interpersonally sensitive behavior. In addition to describing the challenges of performing necessary evils with interpersonal sensitivity, we offer guidance on how individ-

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uals and organizations can address these challenges.

Justice researchers have long recognized the importance of treating those who suffer negative consequences with interpersonal sensitivity. Research has shown that treating victims, survivors, and witnesses in a sensitive interpersonal manner protects both their welfare (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1987; Keashley, Trott, & MacLean, 1994; Tyler & Bies, 1990) and that of the organization (Brockner, 1992; Brockner, 1994; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Recent work by Lind, Greenberg, Scott, and Welchans (2000) underscores the consequences of interpersonally sensitive treatment for an organization's bottom line, demonstrating how employees treated in an interpersonally just manner during termination interviews were less likely to file wrongful-termination claims against their organizations. The importance of treating recipients of negative outcomes with interpersonal sensitivity is echoed as well in recent work on compassion in organizational settings (Dutton, Frost, Worline, & Jacoba, 2002; Kahn, 1993; Luthans, 2002). Frost and his colleagues argue, for example, that "the giving and receiving of compassion restores a sense of humanity and connection to the experiences that people have at work" (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000: 26).

Although previous research provides strong evidence for the importance of treating recipients of necessary evils in an interpersonally sensitive manner, it offers fewer insights into the challenges of producing behavior that meets these valued standards. In explaining why interpersonally sensitive treatment is so rare, despite its evident benefits, Folger and Skarlicki (2001) suggest that interpersonally sensitive treatment exacts emotional costs from those who must perform harmful acts. The personal contact required to accord interpersonal sensitivity exposes performers to their own blameworthiness for the harm, as well as to victims' negative reactions. Performers' aversion to the discomfort they will experience as a result and their misjudgment of that discomfort's anticipated cost (Gilbert, Driver-Linn, & Wilson, 2002) drive those who must conduct layoffs, admit errors, and deliver bad news to distance themselves from their targets (Folger & Skarlicki, 2001). Previous research even suggests that per-

formers may not only fail to act in an interpersonally sensitive manner but may also fail to execute the difficult and noxious task itself (Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, & Wade-Benzoni, 1998; Christakis, 1999; SUPPORT, 1995).

In this article we elaborate the significant psychological challenges performers encounter when carrying out necessary evils. These challenges, we suggest, make it difficult to treat targets in an interpersonally sensitive manner, despite the potential benefits. Not only must performers execute a complex task, whether carrying out a complicated medical procedure, for example, or following a carefully scripted protocol for laying off a worker; they must also grapple with their own internal psychological reactions to the experience of watching another human being suffer, on the one hand, and being the cause of that suffering, on the other. Philosophers have debated the justifiability of these necessary evils (Foot, 1978, 1985; Walzer, 1974; Williams, 1983), but the experience of those who must actually perform these acts largely has been ignored.

We begin by defining the construct of necessary evils and detailing its nine essential dimensions. Variance across these nine dimensions shapes the way in which a performer subjectively experiences the necessary evil. We then describe the performer's subjective experience, capturing it in four psychological states—experienced responsibility, perceived justifiability, experienced palpability, and experienced difficulty—that mediate between the nine dimensions of the construct and a resulting set of thoughts and feelings that we term the *internal drama* (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997). This internal drama comprises guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load. The intensity and mix of thoughts and feelings within the internal drama is what determines the likelihood that a performer will both complete the necessary evil *and* perform it with interpersonal sensitivity. After moving from dimensions of the construct through behavioral outcomes, laying out the logic of the model, we identify the role organizations play in shaping a performer's experience. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of our approach and pointing toward future research directions.

THE NECESSARY EVILS CONSTRUCT

Defining the Construct

We define a necessary evil as *a work-related task in which an individual must, as part of his or her job, perform an act that causes emotional or physical harm to another human being in the service of achieving some perceived greater good or purpose*. Necessary evils have three distinguishing characteristics: (1) a valued objective requires that they be done, hence making them necessary; (2) they inflict ineradicable harm, and they therefore entail evil; and (3) they are integral to the role the performer occupies, thus making them mandatory.

Necessary evils are necessary in the sense that there will be some greater good produced as a result of a performer's actions. The benefit may accrue to an individual, an organization, or society. For example, a painful medical procedure is performed to promote a target's health, a layoff is performed to ensure an organization's survival and prosperity, and a warrant is served to uphold society's laws. In order to be considered a necessary evil, the intended benefit of an action must be something generally, although perhaps not universally, considered of value. Preserving a company's financial health and securing its future are widely considered valued outcomes, for example, even if people disagree about the extent to which they justify laying off workers. For a task to qualify as a necessary evil, there need not be uncontested agreement about whether the value of the benefit produced outweighs the harm of producing it. However, there must be general agreement that the benefit produced is valued.

Our use of the term *evil* reflects the second distinguishing feature of these tasks. Ineradicable harm is being done to another human being (Baumeister, 1999), even if in the service of a greater good. In order to be considered a necessary evil, the expected harm must be something generally, although perhaps not universally, considered impermissible and inhumane. As we will argue, the good produced may make a necessary evil seem more justifiable and thereby reduce its psychological toll on performers, but that does not cancel out the harm and suffering likely to be experienced by the recipient.

Third, necessary evils are tasks that individuals are obligated to perform in order to fulfill the expectations of their professional positions

and roles. As such, the motives of a performer are professional, not personal, and a necessary evil is taken to be a required component of the professional role. Individuals who refuse to perform a necessary evil can face stiff psychological and professional costs (Darley, 1996; Milgram, 1974), including disapproval, suspension, and dismissal.

The distinguishing characteristics of necessary evils highlight the unique situation in which performers find themselves. Performers are catalysts of good who must execute a task to advance that good, yet they are also the proximal cause of harm. In addition, they are witnesses to the harm and potential sources of aid. These roles—catalyst of good, source of harm, witness, and potential source of aid—create psychological ambivalence (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Van Hook & Higgins, 1988; Weick, 1979), the roots and consequences of which we detail in this paper.

Dimensions of the Construct

In this section we introduce nine core dimensions of the necessary evils construct. These dimensions capture the essential nature of a necessary evil as both a *task* that must be performed and an *act* that is infused with meaning (Bruner, 1992). A necessary evil is a performance task that must be executed proficiently in order to advance the valued purpose and fulfill an individual's work responsibilities. It is also an act that can be understood in a plurality of ways as both causing ineradicable harm and contributing to a greater good. Performers experience a necessary evil along both dimensions simultaneously—as a task that requires conscious skill and effort and as an act in which they are causing harm to another human being while advancing a greater good. Because of the inherent dual nature of a necessary evil as both a task and an act, we draw on job characteristics research (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980) to inform the selection of task-based features of a necessary evil and on research about wrongdoing (Bandura, 1991; Darley, 1992; Zimbardo, 1995) to inform the selection of features pertaining to it as an act with variable meaning.

The way in which a performer experiences the necessary evil as both a task and an act is determined by variance across nine dimensions

of the construct. Prior research on performing complex tasks (Gilbert, 1991; Gilbert & Osborne, 1989) and perpetrating harm (Bandura, 1999, 2001; Zimbardo, 1995) suggests that both become more difficult when systematic cognitive processing and explicit self-regulation are stimulated. The nine core dimensions of a necessary evil, we argue, can do just that by complicating its performance as a task and intensifying its meaning as an act, thereby increasing or decreasing the cognitive and emotional stimuli that drive motivation, tax psychological capacity, and shape behavior. Combinations of the nine features complicate the necessary evil as a task and intensify its meaning as an act by affecting (1) the conscious skill and effort the task requires, (2) the performer's own agency—his or her active, volitional contribution—in bringing about the necessary evil and its effects, and (3) the impact of the necessary evil. We introduce the nine dimensions of the construct in terms of these three categories.

Dimensions of the Task

The first set of dimensions characterizes the necessary evil as a task requiring variable levels of skill and effort. First, necessary evils vary in their *complexity*. Task complexity refers to the range of skills required to perform the necessary evil. Skills fall into three broad categories: (1) technical, such as suturing a cut; (2) interpersonal, such as managing a patient and his or her relatives; and (3) intrapersonal, such as coping with the cognitive and emotional burden of performing the procedure. A necessary evil increases in complexity as (1) the number of categories of skills needed to perform the necessary evil increases, (2) the array of skills needed within each category expands, and (3) the level of expertise demanded of each individual skill deepens.

A second dimension is the *frequency* with which a necessary evil occurs within a particular professional role. Conducting a performance review that contains negative feedback is a more frequently sampled activity for most managers than performing a layoff, and both are more common for human resource managers than for sales managers.

Dimensions of Agency

The second set of features captures the degree of active, volitional agency the performer exercises in selecting and executing the necessary evil. The first of these dimensions is the *causal role* played by the performer and the target in necessitating the act. In some instances, the performer has contributed significantly to the conditions necessitating the harm, such as when a manager must fire an employee because the manager's own misguided overestimate of the product's market potential has necessitated this cost-cutting measure. In other cases, such as disinfecting and stitching a laceration sustained from daredevil skateboarding, the target has played a significant role in necessitating the painful and uncomfortable procedure. External circumstances can also play a causal role, as economic conditions sometimes do in leading to a layoff. Necessary evils vary in the causal contribution these various factors make.

The depth and breadth of a performer's *involvement* in the necessary evil itself constitute a second dimension influencing agency. In some cases the performer might only be the executioner of the necessary evil—the one inserting the needle or delivering the bad news, for example. He or she may even be charged with executing the task because of others' buck-passing, which often occurs with tasks that entail noxious tradeoffs (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Tetlock & Boettger, 1994). At other times a performer can also be involved at an earlier stage, deciding on the necessary evil as the course of action to take. For example, a manager might not only execute a layoff, sitting down in one-on-one meetings with targeted employees, but might also be involved in the decision to cut costs by laying people off, or in the intermediate decision of which specific individuals to let go. The depth and breadth of a performer's participation in the conception, design, and execution of the act constitute his or her involvement in the act.

The *legitimacy* of the necessary evil (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002; Zucker, 1987) is a third dimension influencing agency. Legitimacy refers to "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman 1995: 574). In the United

States, for example, layoffs are considered more legitimate than they are in Japan, and they are seen as an accepted part of a manager's role. The more the act is taken for granted as both acceptable and integral to the performer's role, the less agency is required by the performer to actively choose to execute the necessary evil (Zucker, 1991).

Dimensions of the Impact

Necessary evils also vary in the nature of their impact. Every necessary evil generates a benefit and imposes a harm, both of which theoretically could be calculated and both of which, at least at an intuitive level, the performer grasps. The benefit and harm produced can be described in terms of three broad categories, corresponding to utilitarian, Aristotelian, and deontological conceptions, respectively.

First, from a utilitarian point of view, a necessary evil may affect material, physiological, physical, or psychological well-being—positively for beneficiaries and negatively for targets. These utilitarian effects would manifest themselves in measures capturing hedonic well-being (Diener, 2000; Pichanick, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Second, from an Aristotelian perspective, a necessary evil may enhance or impair human capabilities essential to "truly human functioning" (Nussbaum, 2000: 74). Philosophical conceptions of these fundamental capabilities (Nussbaum, 1988, 2000; Sen, 1985, 1992, 1993) coincide with social psychological research on eudaimonic well-being (Pichanick, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), suggesting that when a necessary evil impairs targets' capabilities or enhances those of beneficiaries, it affects their ability to fulfill essential psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This impact would become manifest in measures of eudaimonic well-being (Pichanick, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Finally, from a deontological point of view, a necessary evil may provide benefit and impose harm by extending or exercising respect for beneficiaries' rights and by violating or limiting those rights of targets. The realization or denial of rights might ultimately also affect both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

A necessary evil's impact can encompass multiple forms of benefit and harm, affecting targets and beneficiaries, each in diverse ways. For the performer, however, four features related to the impact shape the experience of executing the necessary evil. The first is the *magnitude* of harm and benefit. Magnitude is a function of both the amount and intensity of the negative and positive impact, reflecting the number of people affected, the extent of the damage or gain, and the type of impact.¹

The second feature of the impact that bears on the performer's experience is the *ratio of harm to benefit*. The harm-to-benefit ratio of a necessary evil refers to the likelihood of the expected harm of the act multiplied by its magnitude, relative to the likelihood of the expected benefit multiplied by its magnitude. Likelihood is simply the probability that the benefit and harm will occur. Removing a foreign body from a patient's eye may have a high probability of causing immediate and acute pain, but it has great likelihood of saving the patient from more damaging complications that could jeopardize vision and call for more painful treatment. This procedure would have a small quotient of harm to benefit.

Salience of the harm and benefit is the third feature of a necessary evil's impact that bears on the performer's experience. Salience refers to how conspicuous or clearly evident the harm and benefit are to the performer at the time of task execution, independent of their respective magnitudes. Salience is a function of vividness and immediacy (Latané, 1981; Loewenstein, 1996). Imagine, for example, the pained look of a frightened child about to receive a needle; the anxiety and dismay of an engineer about to hear what he feared would be true but hoped would not—that he will lose his job; or the disappointed look of a student being told she has done a poor job on an important assignment.

¹ The type of damage or gain can vary across and within categories of impact. Some necessary evils affect material, physiological, physical, or psychological well-being (utilitarian category of impact), and others damage or enhance capabilities (Aristotelian category of impact). Within categories of impact, some necessary evils affect material well-being but not psychological well-being, whereas for others it may be the reverse, and necessary evils that enhance or impair capabilities may vary in the set of capabilities they affect. Different types of harm and benefit are considered worse or better, thus affecting the magnitude of the harm and benefit.

Although the actual harm in each of these cases may be no different from that experienced by a stone-faced recipient, the target's expressed distress, in close physical proximity to the performer, accentuates the salience of the harm being caused (Darley, 1992; Loewenstein, 1996). The effect of the harm is also immediate, thus further contributing to its salience (Metcalf & Mischel, 1999), whereas the benefit—immunity to an outbreak of disease, organizational profitability, or improved academic performance—may be invisible or remote in time.

The *identity of the target* is a fourth feature of a necessary evil's impact that influences a performer's experience. Two aspects of the target's identity are relevant: (1) the extent to which the performer identifies with the target and his or her fate (Desmarais & Lerner, 1994; Lerner, 1981; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976) and (2) the extent to which the target is also a beneficiary of the necessary evil. A performer will experience the necessary evil differently if he or she has a stronger bond with the target, whether through a close personal or professional relationship or through occupying a similar organizational role. The performer's experience will also vary if the target benefits from the necessary evil. In some cases, such as medical procedures or tough-love discipline applied to addicts, the target of the necessary evil is also its beneficiary. In other cases of necessary evils, however, the beneficiary and target are different individuals or entities. The beneficiary may be another individual, as in the case of a landlord who benefits from an eviction, an organization and its shareholders, as in the case of a layoff, or society at large, as in the case of a judge upholding legal principle when delivering a stiff penalty.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF CREATING INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY

Having described the key dimensions of variance in the necessary evils construct, we now turn our attention to the psychological challenges of performing the necessary evil with interpersonal sensitivity. What makes a necessary evil potentially so difficult to perform, especially with interpersonal sensitivity? Although it is the necessary evil itself that initiates the psychological and performance challenges the performer encounters, the extent of these challenges depends on how the per-

former experiences and interprets (1) the task as one requiring conscious skill and effort (Bargh, 1997; Bargh & Barndollar, 1996; Gilbert, 1991), (2) the self's own agency in selecting and executing the necessary evil and bringing about its effects (Bandura, 2001; Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001; Zimbardo, 1995), and (3) the impact of the necessary evil as objectionable (Bandura, 1999; Zimbardo, 1995).

A performer's experience and appraisal of task, agency, and impact can be captured in four psychological states that mediate (Baron & Kenny, 1986) the relationship between dimensions of the construct and the performer's internal drama (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997)—that mix of thoughts and emotions (guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load) unleashed in the performer as he or she executes the necessary evil. To be clear, *dimensions of the construct* describe properties of the necessary evil; *mediating psychological states* reflect the performer's judgment, beliefs, and attitudes about the task, the self, and the impact; and the *internal drama* captures the ensuing emotions and thoughts, about oneself and the target, unleashed as a result of that appraisal (Lazarus, 1991).

Research on universal dimensions of cognitive appraisal (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), as well as social cognitive theory—applied to both the precursors of harm doing (Bandura, 1999) and effective task performance (Bandura, 1997)—indicates that a performer's cognitive and emotional grasp of the necessary evil can be described in terms of four psychological states: (1) the extent to which the performer feels personally *responsible* for causing harm (Bandura, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985); (2) the extent to which the performer perceives the harm caused to be *justifiable* in light of the good produced (Bandura, 1991; Zimbardo, 1995); (3) the extent to which the performer finds the task *difficult* when handling the technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal demands of the necessary evil (Bandura, 1997; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985); and (4) the extent to which the harm and benefit produced by the act are *palpable*, registering vividly on the performer at the moment of task execution (Darley, 1992; Latané, 1981; Zimbardo, 1995). It is these four psychological states that affect the intensity and mix of thoughts and feelings within the internal drama. We now de-

scribe each of these mediating psychological states, their antecedents, and consequences.

Mediating Psychological State 1: Experienced Responsibility

The first mediating psychological state is the extent to which a performer feels personally responsible for causing harm, pain, or discomfort. Personal responsibility is a function of three features of a necessary evil: (1) the causal role of the performer in creating the conditions that necessitate the harmful act, (2) the extent to which the performer is personally involved in carrying out the act, and (3) the legitimacy of the act.

Despite the pervasive tendency of people to attribute negative outcomes of their own behavior to situational factors (Zuckerman, 1979), a performer's causal role and involvement can attenuate this tendency, leading to greater experienced responsibility (Weiner, Graham, & Chandler, 1982). Performers who have played a significant role in creating the conditions requiring the necessary evil are likely to experience more personal responsibility for causing harm than those who have played a minimal role (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998). For example, a manager who has failed to coach a poorly performing employee will feel more personal responsibility for creating conditions that necessitate firing that employee than will a manager who has tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to change an employee's behavior through feedback and mentoring (Toffler, 1986).

A second source of experienced responsibility is the performer's involvement in the necessary evil. The more extensive the performer's involvement in the act, from conception to execution, the greater sense of responsibility he or she will be likely to experience for the harm being caused (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Darley, 1996; Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Silver & Geller, 1978). Research on wrongdoing identifies how a division of labor reduces a person's sense of moral responsibility (Brief et al., 2001; Kelman, 1973; Silver & Geller, 1978), and research on job design indicates how task identity—doing a whole piece of work—increases a person's sense of responsibility (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). We propose a similar effect with necessary evils. The broader a performer's involvement across discrete stages of the necessary evil and the deeper

his or her involvement in any one stage, the more the performer will be exposed to his or her own agency in contributing to the necessary evil and its effects. As a result, the performer will experience greater responsibility.

The legitimacy of the necessary evil, a third factor, also contributes to experienced responsibility. A necessary evil sanctioned by broader social, professional, or organizational norms is more likely to be taken for granted as an appropriate act in the given situation (Brief et al., 2001). The greater the legitimacy, the more a performer will experience the necessary evil as commissioned by an authority outside the self, rather than originating from his or her own agency (Bandura, 1999; Darley, 1992; Milgram, 1974). Whatever the harm done, it is less likely to trigger doubts and questions, which are preempted by broad acceptance of the practice. In contrast, a necessary evil that does not have an assumed license or authorization will underscore the performer's sense of personally selecting, designing, or executing the harm to bring about the good.

Psychological Consequences of Experienced Responsibility

Awareness of one's causal role in doing someone harm is a crucial onset condition for guilt (Tangney, 1991). Research in psychology (Eisenberg, 2000; Ferguson & Stegge, 1998; Tangney, 1995) and organizational behavior (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997) suggests that the level of guilt an individual experiences when engaging in an act varies with the intensity of his or her experienced personal responsibility. Bandura and his colleagues (Bandura et al., 1996) have shown that individuals will refuse to cause pain when they experience personal responsibility for their actions, even under extreme pressure to perform. Because performers of necessary evils in professional settings cannot refuse to perform their professional duties, ambivalence elicited from the experience of causing harm, we propose, is channeled into guilt. We therefore propose a link between experienced responsibility and guilt.

Proposition 1: The greater a performer's subjective experience of responsibility, the more intense his or her experience of guilt will be.

Mediating Psychological State 2: Perceived Justifiability

The second psychological state mediating the relationship between the dimensions of a necessary evil and a performer's internal drama is the extent to which a performer, in his or her own intuitive, moral judgment, perceives the harm caused to be justifiable or warranted in light of the good produced. Perceived justifiability is a function of five features of a necessary evil: (1) the causal role of the target in creating the conditions that necessitate the harmful act, (2) the legitimacy of the act, (3) the frequency of the task, (4) the harm-to-benefit ratio, and (5) the identity of the target.

Attribution theory explains how the target's causal role contributes to perceived justifiability. People have a pervasive tendency to attribute another individual's behavior to that individual's disposition, rather than to situational factors (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Jones & Harris, 1967; Repenning & Sterman, 2002). With a necessary evil, when the target's own behavior has made the harmful action necessary, the tendency of the performer to make a dispositional inference will be accentuated (Fleming & Darley, 1989; Weiner, 1995). The performer will attribute greater responsibility for the necessary evil to the target—responsibility that escalates with the severity of consequences wrought by the target's behavior (Walster, 1966). With increased responsibility assigned to the target, the performer will experience the necessary evil as more justifiable than if the target had little or nothing to do with necessitating the harm. The harm a target incurs from losing his or her job because of his or her own repeated accounting errors is likely to be perceived as more justifiable than the harm a target incurs from a layoff attributable to an economic downturn.

The legitimacy of a necessary evil contributes to its perceived justifiability by licensing the harm caused. An act broadly taken for granted as acceptable will be perceived, even by the one performing the act, as more justifiable than an act with similar harmful effects and beneficial outcomes that does not have such assumed acceptance (Zimbardo, 1995). Frequency also contributes to a necessary evil's perceived justifiability. When necessary evils are a recurrent activity on the job, performers will tend to accentuate the good produced and deemphasize

the harm in order to resolve the inconsistency between their recognition of the harm they are causing and their continued performance of the painful act (Festinger, 1957; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). Frequently performed necessary evils thus come to be seen as less problematic and more justifiable.

Perhaps the most obvious antecedent of perceived justifiability is the ratio of harm to benefit. Performers will experience a necessary evil to be less justifiable when they judge the harm imposed to be greater overall than the benefit produced. Harm and benefit alike are assessed in terms of their magnitude and likelihood. A layoff of several hundred employees that seems to hold little promise of transforming the fortunes of a troubled company will be perceived as less justifiable than a layoff of several dozen employees judged critical for securing an organization's survival.

A final feature of the construct influencing perceived justifiability is the identity of the target. When the target and beneficiary of a necessary evil are different parties, as in a layoff or eviction, questions about the rightfulness of interpersonal tradeoffs are implicated—questions not present when the target is the beneficiary, as is the case with most medical procedures. Harming one party to benefit another represents a taboo tradeoff (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000), throwing the justifiability of the act into deeper question than when the target is the beneficiary and must absorb harm to realize a gain.

Psychological Consequences of Perceived Justifiability

Perceived justifiability (or unjustifiability) from all of these sources influences the level of guilt and sympathy an individual experiences when performing a necessary evil. When perceived as less justifiable, a performer experiences a necessary evil as shading into wrongdoing, which produces self-directed feelings of guilt (Eisenberg, 2000; Ferguson & Stegge, 1998; Tangney, 1991). Witnessing unwarranted harm experienced by the target also increases other-directed feelings of sympathy (Eisenberg, 2000).²

² Sympathy has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Eisenberg (2000) differentiates among sympathy, perspec-

The relationship between perceived justifiability and guilt and sympathy leads to the following propositions.

Proposition 2a: The less justifiable the performer perceives the act to be, the more intense his or her experience of guilt will be.

Proposition 2b: The less justifiable the performer perceives the act to be, the more intense his or her experience of sympathy will be.

Mediating Psychological State 3: Experienced Task Difficulty

Experienced task difficulty is the extent to which performers experience the necessary evil as challenging their technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal abilities. Two features of the construct affect experienced difficulty: (1) the complexity of the task and (2) the frequency with which the task occurs. Some necessary evils pose a greater array of performance challenges than others. For example, suturing a crying toddler's cut involves technical skills to assess the wound and insert the stitches appropriately; interpersonal skills to manage the child, the child's parents, and other medical personnel present; and intrapersonal skills to maintain one's focus and composure. The complexity of executing that necessary evil is greater than drawing blood from an adult, for example, and, as a result, will typically be experienced by physicians as more difficult.

Frequency has an opposing relationship with difficulty. The greater the frequency, the lower the experienced difficulty. When the task is a routine part of one's professional role, the per-

former develops implicit knowledge of how to perform the task. More aspects of the task come under automatic rather than systematic psychological processing (Bagozzi & Kimmel, 1995; Bargh, 1997; Bargh & Barndollar, 1996; Triandis, 1980), and the task becomes easier to perform.

Psychological Consequences of Experienced Difficulty

Experienced difficulty affects both cognitive load and performance anxiety. When a task proves difficult for a performer, it imposes a heavier cognitive load—the mentally taxing experience of maintaining heightened awareness and focused attention (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988). Independent of the load it imposes, a more challenging task also is more likely than a less challenging task to consume, or even outstrip, a performer's capabilities. The closer the task comes to tapping a performer's level of competence, the more likely the performer will experience performance anxiety—the unsettling sensation of self-doubt that sets in when one feels one has insufficient skills and abilities to meet the demands of a task (Bandura, 1997; Csikzentmihalyi, 1975; Sajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Wood & Bandura, 1989). As a result of these effects, we make the following propositions.

Proposition 3a: The more difficult a performer experiences a necessary evil to be, the heavier the cognitive load it will impose.

Proposition 3b: The more difficult a performer experiences a necessary evil to be, the more intense his or her feeling of performance anxiety will be.

Mediating Psychological State 4: Experienced Palpability

Experienced palpability is the degree to which the intensity of the harm and benefit produced by a necessary evil registers on a performer at the moment of task execution. Palpability occurs along multiple channels. Performers can palpably experience the effects of their actions cognitively, through an intellectual understanding of harm being caused or benefit being produced (Davis, 1983a,b; Eisenberg, 2000). Performers can also

tive taking, and empathy, whereas Batson (1998) subsumes perspective taking and sympathy within the construct of empathy. For Eisenberg, sympathy refers to the sorrow and concern one feels toward another, and it may follow from the emotional experience of empathy—experiencing what the other is experiencing—or from a cognitive grasp of what the other is going through—that is, perspective taking. Batson (1998) sees each of these pieces as components of the empathy construct. As the confusion gets sorted out among emotion researchers, we have, for reasons of clarity and simplicity, used the term *sympathy* because it is closely identified with the sorrow and concern that one feels toward another based on the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition (Eisenberg, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2002).

emotionally experience palpability (Loewenstein, 1996; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). For example, when witnessing another's pain and suffering, people's facial muscles tend to react as if they themselves were experiencing the pain and suffering (Vaughan & Lanzetta, 1981), thereby creating in those observers an emotional experience comparable to the one they are witnessing. Four features of the necessary evils construct affect the extent to which the harm and benefit of the necessary evil are cognitively and emotionally palpable to a performer: (1) the frequency with which a necessary evil occurs, (2) the magnitude of harm and benefit; (3) the salience of that harm and benefit, and (4) the identity of the target.

The first source of palpability is the frequency of the necessary evil. The more common a necessary evil is in a particular role, the more desensitized the performer will likely become to its effects—both to the recipient's pain and suffering and to the performer's own thoughts and emotions. For example, the more times a manager experiences the pained look of an employee being laid off and the more times a doctor delivers a cancer diagnosis to an anxious family, the less poignantly the unsettling dimensions of these tasks will register on each of these performers (Hochschild, 1983; Kahn, 1990; Maslach, 1982).

The second source of palpability is the magnitude of the harm and the benefit. The greater the harm and the greater the benefit produced, the more likely they will be to register, at least cognitively, on the performer at the time of task execution.

The salience of the harm and benefit also affects experienced palpability (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). Although a physician may intellectually understand that inserting a large needle into a vein can be a painful procedure, the patient's pain will be even more palpable to the doctor if the patient conspicuously winces in pain, as opposed to stoically enduring the procedure in silence (Gawande, 2002). In this way, verbal and nonverbal cues of distress sent by the target can accentuate palpability (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991; Ekman, 1993).

Finally, the identity of the target of a necessary evil is a fourth source of experienced palpability. When the performer has strong "identity relations" with the target, through either a

personal relationship or role identification, the harm caused will register more intensely on a performer than if a target is an unknown or unrelated entity (Desmarais & Lerner, 1994; Lerner, 1981; Lerner et al., 1976).

Psychological Consequences of Experienced Palpability

Palpability influences sympathy, guilt, cognitive load, and performance anxiety. The more palpable the harm, the more it will induce sympathy—"an emotional response stemming from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition" (Eisenberg, 2000: 671–672). Vivid and immediate indications of the harm increase cognitive assessments of the harm, as well as its visceral grip on human emotions (Loewenstein, 1996; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999), which together lead to greater sympathy.

Palpability also affects guilt. The more palpable a target's expressed distress, the clearer the signal will be to the performer that his or her own actions are having a negative impact (Milgram, 1974). When the victim of a layoff is visibly shaken, for example, a manager will experience more responsibility for producing harm than when the victim stoically accepts his negative fate, or when the act is performed in a less personalized, more socially distant manner, such as by phone or e-mail (Sussman & Sproull, 1999). In this way, palpable distress serves as an "involvement cue" (Fleming & Darley, 1989) intensifying the performer's inference that he or she is the cause of the outcome and leading to a heightened sense of guilt (Bandura et al., 1996).

Palpability also affects cognitive load and performance anxiety. When the harm is conspicuous, the performer's attention will be drawn to it and to his or her own role in bringing it about, thereby adding further burden to a performer's limited cognitive resources. In contrast, when the benefit is conspicuous, the cost of failure—of not realizing the benefit—looms large, potentially intensifying the self-doubt and preoccupation with one's own capabilities. That heightens performance anxiety.

Proposition 4a: The greater the experienced palpability of the harm, the more intense the performer's experience of sympathy will be.

Proposition 4b: The greater the experienced palpability of the harm, the more intense the performer's experience of guilt will be.

Proposition 4c: The greater the experienced palpability of the harm, the heavier the cognitive load the performer will experience.

Proposition 4d: The greater the experienced palpability of the benefit, the more intense the performer's experience of performance anxiety will be.

OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH NECESSARY EVILS

We have argued thus far that variance along nine dimensions of a necessary evil affects four psychological states: responsibility, justifiability, difficulty, and palpability. These psychological states, in turn, shape the performer's internal drama, which consists of guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load. The combination and intensity of thoughts and feelings within the internal drama drive motivation and tax psychological capacity, which together determine the outcome of a necessary evil. We now turn our attention to these outcomes.

The outcome of a necessary evil—in particular, the likelihood that a performer will complete the task and perform it in an interpersonally sensitive manner—is a function of motivation and capacity. In turn, motivation and capacity are a function of the guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load the performer experiences.

Beginning with motivation, guilt and sympathy contribute to a cross-cutting pair of motivations. On the one hand, guilt and sympathy generate prosocial motivation (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Davis, 1983b; Tangney, 1995), which drives a performer to be interpersonally sensitive. However, when experienced at high levels, guilt and sympathy also can generate personal distress in a performer (Baumeister et al., 1994; Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 1982), which adds to any distress generated by the individual's performance anxiety. The combined personal distress creates a threat to self (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 1982), motivating a self-protective response (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Kets de Vries

& Balazs, 1997), such as avoidance or exit, rather than a prosocial response.³

Guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load have a second effect. They tax an individual's capacity to perform the necessary evil with interpersonal sensitivity (Eisenberg, 2000; Wiesenfeld et al., 2000). Capacity refers to the intrapsychic resources available to a performer at the moment of task execution for handling the technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal demands of performing the task (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Rothbard, 2001; Salas, Driskell, & Hughes, 1996; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Following Baumeister, Muraven, and Tice (2000), our premise is that psychological resources are finite and can be depleted by competing demands that arise in performing a necessary evil. Even if performers are highly motivated to behave in a prosocial manner, this motivation must be matched with sufficient available psychological capacity. That capacity is increasingly depleted as guilt, sympathy, performance anxiety, and cognitive load rise. Psychological resources otherwise allocated to interpersonally sensitive treatment are diverted to manage cognitive load, to regulate the self (Gilbert & Osborne, 1989; Mischel, Cantor, & Feldman, 1996), and to "alleviate one's affective state" (Eisenberg, 2000: 672). Since that affective state is likely to be negative, performing a necessary evil—in contrast to the expansive and constructive benefits of positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003)—will narrow the performer's focus and limit the performer's behavioral options (Easterbrook, 1959; Gilligan & Bower, 1984; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981; Wachtel, 1967; Weltman, Smith, & Egstrom, 1971). Therefore, a performer's ability to complete the task effectively, let alone create a personal connection with the target, will decline.

When cast in the light of dueling motivations and competing demands on psychological capacity, interpersonal sensitivity—the normative prescription indicated by justice research—is a precarious possibility. To achieve interpersonal

³ Interpersonally sensitive behavior may nonetheless result if it is the most efficient form of relief for the self-threat (Batson, 1998; Eisenberg, 2000) or when sympathy, taken independently, is at an intermediate but not distressing level. In such a case, sympathy may moderate the effects of guilt and performance anxiety, which would otherwise give rise to self-protective motivation.

sensitivity as indicated in justice research, an individual performing a necessary evil must experience sufficient guilt and sympathy to result in prosocial motivation. However, guilt and sympathy must not be so intense that, in combination with performance anxiety, self-protective motivation outweighs prosocial motivation. In addition, the cumulative psychological demands of cognitive load, on the one hand, and the personal distress caused by guilt, sympathy, and performance anxiety, on the other, must not exhaust psychological capacity. In short, although performers may intend to produce behavior that achieves the dual outcomes of task completion and interpersonal sensitivity, the very experience of performing a necessary evil may limit their ability to do so.

The intensity of the internal drama unleashed by a necessary evil creates significant challenges for those called on to perform these tasks. Their resulting behavior—a function of the combined effect of capacity and motivation—can be mapped along two continua, each representing a dimension of effective performance: (1) whether the performer completes or fails to complete the necessary evil and (2) whether the performer does or does not treat the target with interpersonal sensitivity. Although completing the necessary evil may seem to be a foregone conclusion for those called on to perform such a task, prior research on task performance under stress (Bowers, Weaver, & Morgan, 1996; Hackman, 1970; Staw et al., 1981; Weick, 1995), on making tradeoffs (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997), on negotiating between the normative and appetitive self (Bazerman et al., 1998), and on clinical medical practice (Christakis, 1999; SUPPORT, 1995), together with the psychological challenges we have detailed in this article, suggests that successfully completing a necessary evil is an uncertain outcome not to be taken for granted.

Of equal importance is *how* the necessary evil is performed. Prior work on compassion and procedural justice underscores the importance of interpersonal sensitivity—establishing the benefits associated with respecting the needs, rights, and feelings of the recipient of a negative outcome. Together, these two outcome dimensions—task completion and interpersonal sensitivity—create four discrete possibilities that represent the range of outcomes. We now detail the relationship between the performer's inter-

nal drama and these four representative outcomes.

The first possible outcome represents the normative ideal indicated in justice research. The performer completes the necessary evil and performs it with interpersonal sensitivity. For example, a manager delivers clear, negative feedback to a direct report, but in a respectful manner; a doctor successfully executes a spinal tap, reassuring and comforting the patient during the procedure; or an officer evicts a delinquent tenant, consoling the tenant and guiding him or her to available support. To be able to complete the necessary evil in an interpersonally sensitive manner, a performer must operate under a unique set of conditions: he or she must experience moderate levels of guilt and sympathy, sufficient to generate prosocial motivation yet insufficient to paralyze him or her with excessive distress, and he or she must not be too overburdened by the combination of emotional distress and cognitive load created by the task so that his or her psychological capacity can be effectively allocated to manage the multiple demands of the task—technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Salas et al., 1996).

When these conditions are not present, a performer will be forced into psychological triage (Weick, 1995), producing behavior that in some way fails to meet criteria for effective performance. Either the target is not treated with interpersonal sensitivity or the task is not completed—or both. All three of these suboptimal outcomes originate in a shared internal drama: a performer experiences high levels of guilt, sympathy, and performance anxiety—so much so that the resulting personal distress creates a strong motivation to protect the self—and the mix of emotions, motivational demands, and cognitive load taxes the individual's psychological capacity.

We begin with the first suboptimal outcome: the necessary evil is completed but without interpersonal sensitivity. How might this happen? In the face of an intense internal drama, the performer is likely to seek relief from distress. One way of relieving distress is to avoid or dissociate (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Lerner & Becker, 1996). Avoidance and dissociation conserve available psychological resources and allow performers to allocate their attention and cognitive processing to the most pressing or most manageable demands—for example, get-

ting the task done (Weick, 1995). In order to complete the task, the performer withdraws to such an extent that he or she does not execute it with interpersonal sensitivity.⁴

Instead of blocking out or shutting off the emotional side of the process, performers may also become engulfed by it. This produces the second suboptimal outcome (and third possible outcome overall). Overwhelmed by guilt and sympathy (Eisenberg, 2000), performers channel intensely high levels of prosocial motivation into the production of an interpersonally sensitive response, at the expense of being able to perform the technical demands of the necessary evil. The classic "MUM effect" described by Tesser and Rosen (1975), in which people avoid transmitting unpleasant messages, is one such outcome. Imagine, for example, a manager so uncomfortable delivering negative feedback, or so anguished by the impact that firing a direct report will have on that individual, that the manager offers pleasantries and comforting reassurances but simply cannot utter the frank message (Bazerman et al., 1998). Although performers may experience themselves in this third outcome state as being interpersonally sensitive, their conduct does not respect the target's rights, needs, and feelings. Rather, it indulges the performer's own needs and feelings at the expense of the target.

The third suboptimal outcome (and fourth possible outcome overall) is that a performer will fail both to complete the task and treat the target with interpersonal sensitivity. In order to alleviate an intense internal drama, a performer may simply exit the situation. Research suggests that when facing situations that entail unsettling tradeoffs, people often seek means to avoid performing the act (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Tetlock & Boettger, 1994). Alternatively, this outcome may occur when a performer's attempts to complete the necessary evil, and to do so with interpersonal sensitivity, are frustrated by the overwhelming psychological burdens unleashed in trying to realize both aims (Christakis, 1999; Groopman, 2002; Salas et al., 1996). This indicates just how tenuous the foundation for compassionate and just treatment can be.

⁴ Completing the task without interpersonal sensitivity will also result when a performer experiences insufficient guilt and sympathy to stimulate prosocial motivation.

Efforts to accord interpersonally sensitive treatment may impede completion of the task and realization of the good the task is designed to produce. Striving to be interpersonally sensitive may cause the performer to behave suboptimally, perhaps even leading, paradoxically, to the sort of poor treatment that elicits in targets the strong negative emotion and antisocial behavior that just, fair, and caring treatment is designed to prevent (Folger & Skarlicki, 2001; Greenberg, 1993; Lind et al., 2000).

ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCES

Organizations play a significant role in shaping a performer's experience and, as a result, in determining the likelihood of successful task execution and interpersonally sensitive conduct. In this section we illustrate how organizations influence the experience of performers through task design (Griffin, 1983, 1987; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and task framing (Goffman, 1974; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

Task Design

Two elements of a necessary evil's design—exposure to the target's distress and fragmentation of the task—structurally alter some (but not necessarily all) of a necessary evil's core dimensions. These two design factors shape the salience of the harm and benefit, the performer's level of involvement, and the complexity of the task, influencing, in turn, the experience of performing a necessary evil.

Exposure. By exposing performers to the harm they are causing, organizations can manipulate the salience of that harm and, as a result, influence performers' motivational state (Metcalf & Mischel, 1999). Consider, for example, how one organization in Wright and Barling's study designed its downsizing process:

"There were blackboards, so we put all the names on the boards, and we just sat there, and I can remember, it gave me the creeps, there was this stunned silence, and we felt like it was the Vietnam wall or something. We were that upset, all of us . . . saying, look what we are doing to all those people! Isn't there any other way? Why are we doing this? It was horrible" (manager quoted in Wright & Barling, 1998: 342).

Because the list of names made the harm more conspicuous—thus increasing the salience of the harm—the team of downsizers experienced the harm more palpably, altering the harm-to-benefit ratio in their eyes. The managers' subsequent questioning of the downsizing suggests rising doubt in their minds about its justifiability.

Organizations can modulate exposure by adjusting a performer's physical proximity to the target (Latané, 1981). Variations in the famous Milgram experiments (Milgram, 1974) provide a rich example. By manipulating the proximity of the subject applying shocks to the experimental confederate receiving them, experimenters elicited different levels of obedience from the subject. Comparable alterations in task design may have a similar effect in organizational settings. For example, when delivering bad news, performers experienced less discomfort when delivering the negative message through e-mail than through face-to-face communication (Sussman & Sproull, 1999).

Fragmentation. By designing tasks so that their component parts are distributed among multiple parties, organizations can reduce the extent of a single performer's involvement. With a layoff, for example, those who decide on the need for it may be separate from those who identify the appropriate positions to eliminate, and they may be different from the people who actually perform the act itself, face to face with the victim. Structuring the task into components diffuses responsibility (Bandura et al., 1996; Darley, 1996; Silver & Geller, 1978; Vaughan, 1996, 1999) and reduces any one performer's experienced responsibility for having caused harm (Kelman, 1973).

Fragmentation also shapes the complexity of a necessary evil and the salience of its harm and benefit. When pieces of the task are divided among multiple people, the range of skills needed for any one of those pieces declines, making the necessary evil less complex for any individual performer. Fragmenting a necessary evil into discrete pieces can also expose a performer to—or shield the performer from—aspects of its impact. As a result, organizations alter the salience of the necessary evil's harm and benefit, with subsequent effects on experienced palpability.

Task Framing

Whereas task design influences a performer's experience by structurally modifying the way in which a necessary evil is performed, task framing influences a performer's psychological experience by modifying the necessary evil's meaning. Frames shape the way in which a performer cognitively appraises the necessary evil, which, in turn, influences the performer's subsequent emotional reaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). A performer's appraisal of a situation hinges on the meaning that he or she assigns the situation (Seeman, 1997; Weick, 1995), and that meaning is shaped by frames—structures of interpretation that render situations understandable (Goffman, 1974; Snow et al., 1986). Organizations are a vital source of frames for those who perform necessary evils, intervening to make the experience of harming others and executing difficult tasks less unsettling by shaping the meaning of that experience. Prior research (Bandura et al., 1996) suggests that two methods of framing will have a significant impact on how performers experience and handle necessary evils: social accounts and goals.

Social accounts. One powerful way in which organizations frame necessary evils is through social accounts (Bies & Shapiro, 1987, 1988; Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). According to Sitkin and Bies, social accounts are explanations that attempt to "influence a person's perception of (a) responsibility for an incident or action, (b) motives for an action, or (c) the unfavorability of an incident or action" (1993: 353). With necessary evils, social accounts can change the meaning of the harm being done, minimizing—or even transforming—that harm in the eyes of the performer (Brief et al., 2001; Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Greenberg, 1990; Sykes & Matza, 1957). For example, anecdotes that recount how employees dismissed in the past have found better opportunities as a result of their dismissal (Smith, 1994) can frame an impending layoff as a blessing in disguise for victims. The magnitude of the harm is thereby minimized in performers' eyes, and the likelihood of harm can be transformed as well. In addition to changing the meaning of the harm done, accounts can also magnify the benefit of a necessary evil, such as the refrain heard often

from companies that a layoff is needed to restore the company to health (Noer, 1993). With the ratio of harm to benefit reduced, the necessary evil appears more justifiable, and guilt declines.

Social accounts can also change the meaning of a performer's involvement, diffusing responsibility by framing one's role in the necessary evil as but a small piece in the causal chain. Without changing the harm being done or the extent of a manager's involvement in performing the necessary evil, one company reduced a manager's guilt by clarifying the larger context within which his involvement, and thus responsibility, fell:

When James Smith, 47, a division manager in Indianapolis, had to fire 20 of his 80 subordinates in 1988, he fretted that if he had led his troops better he might have prevented the downsizing. His guilt grew into a sense of personal failure. "I would characterize my reaction as depression," he says, "waking up at 2 A.M., crying at times, feeling out of control of things" . . . He is still cutting staff, but AT&T has made the anguish of his assignment more bearable. The company has taken great pains to explain how changes in the global marketplace and not managerial failures forced the restructuring (Smith, 1994: 52).

On its own, an account does not change the actual harm being done or the performer's role in it. It neither hands a layoff victim his or her job back nor provides better severance or outplacement counseling, nor does it release a manager from doing the deed. However, by accentuating the good—the remedial benefits to the firm and the discovered opportunities for victims—or attributing blame to external circumstances, social accounts can influence a performer's subjective assessment of justifiability and experience of responsibility (Lee & Tiedens, 2001).

Goals. In addition to providing accounts, organizations also influence a performer's cognitive appraisal of a necessary evil by framing the act in terms of a particular goal or purpose (Dweck, 2000; Hackman, 1986; Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981; Schon, 1983). Consider the example of a medical resident working at a teaching hospital. When called on to repair a laceration, the resident can understand the task in two different ways: as stitching a patient's laceration or, in the context of a teaching hospital and medical apprenticeship, as *learning* to stitch a patient's laceration.

Although the resident might neither be proficient nor feel proficient in the skills necessary to suture, he or she might be and feel more proficient in the skills necessary to learn. The meaning assigned to the task can therefore frame the nature of the challenge the performer faces (Dweck, 2000; Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001), altering his or her experience of the necessary evil's difficulty and, ultimately, the level of performance anxiety and cognitive load experienced.

Organizations can also influence a performer's cognitive appraisal of a necessary evil by connecting the act to a worthy purpose. Vallacher and Wegner's (1987) theory of action identification indicates that people have the capacity to understand the actions in which they are engaged at various levels of analysis, ranging from low-level analysis of how the action is performed to high-level analysis of why the action is performed. A goal that supplies the "why" for a necessary evil can underscore its constructive purpose—restoring an individual's health, for a painful medical procedure, or a company's health, for a layoff (Lerner & Becker, 1996). In this way, goals can sometimes serve as social accounts.

An espoused purpose can also underscore the negative consequences associated with *not* performing the necessary evil, which, at the extreme in these examples, might be deterioration and possible death. In either case, the espoused purpose increases the magnitude of the benefit in the eyes of the performer, making that benefit cognitively more available (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) so that it then weighs more heavily in judgments of justifiability and thereby induces less guilt. This then affects the performer's motivation and capacity to complete the task with interpersonal sensitivity.

DISCUSSION

Research on procedural and interactional justice has documented the wide range of benefits that accrue to individuals, groups, and organizations from treating people in a fair and just manner. Less attention, however, has been given to systematically accounting the challenges performers face in attempting to meet these standards, especially in situations where these individuals are causing emotional or physical pain to other human beings (Folger &

Skarlicki, 2001). Our work contributes to this research by providing a conceptual framework for understanding the psychological challenges of performing necessary evils with interpersonal sensitivity. We have identified what we believe to be key psychological dimensions of a performer's experience, and we have articulated a series of theoretical propositions about how each of these dimensions affects a performer's capacity (Wiesenfeld et al., 2000) and motivation to be interpersonally sensitive.

The angle of our focus, we believe, makes a distinctive contribution to organization theory and research. In addition to offering an original perspective on the classic organizational theme of justice, our model tilts the theoretical lens to magnify the felt experience of performers. Although necessary evils could be examined from a variety of conceptual vantage points, we have focused our analysis on the powerful dynamics unleashed at the moment of task execution and, in particular, on how performers subjectively experience those dynamics. Our aim is to illuminate the cognitive and emotional struggles performers face in executing tasks that call for interpersonal sensitivity. To understand performers' experience, we have unearthed the many factors that shape their motivation and capacity to conduct themselves with interpersonal sensitivity while still getting the task done. Joining a short list of researchers who have begun to focus on the performer's perspective (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998, 2001; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Wright & Barling, 1998), we have elaborated an original model of the "backstage" (Goffman, 1959) challenges of performing necessary evils with interpersonal sensitivity. In doing so, we believe that we have uncovered a set of variables that can help guide future research in this practically and theoretically important domain.

By examining the felt experience of performers, we have sought to advance and deepen the rediscovery of emotion in organizations. As organizational researchers increasingly turn their attention to the emotional side of life inside organizations (Domagalski, 1999; Fineman, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989), the complex nature of organizational actors' felt experiences will continue to emerge. We hope our theoretical account of necessary evils not only acknowledges the presence of a vibrant emotional experience but also unveils the mix-

ture of competing genuine emotions individuals experience and the counterintuitive effects those emotions and their interactions can have on behavior.

The target of our focus—necessary evils—is also novel, exposing a phenomenon central to professional and managerial work (Applbaum, 1999; Badaracco, 1997; Toffler, 1986; Williams, 1983) but largely ignored in organizational research. Individuals are called on to execute noxious tasks that would be prohibited if not for the larger purpose those tasks serve and the greater good they produce. These tasks are noxious not only for those who must bear their negative impact but also for those who must perform them. We have attempted here to sketch the depth and breadth of the performer's experience, so integral to professional roles and to the process of advancing organizational purposes.

Finally, we have attempted to address a significant challenge that bedevils many areas of organizational research. The importance of interpersonally sensitive behavior, on numerous grounds, has been well documented. Less well understood is how the conduct that has such beneficial consequences can be realized in action. Implementing well-developed insights about effective conduct reflects a challenge at the heart of organizational theory and research (Argyris, 1969; Hackman, 1985; Weick, 1999). Converting normative guidance derived from empirical research into effective practice requires an understanding of the conversion process itself. Here we have attempted to model one such conversion process. Previous research provides a rich set of suggestions for how necessary evils should be performed, but in little research have scholars explored the challenges of actually performing these actions when confronted with the raw experience of real situations. Our framework identifies these challenges and, thus, sets up a promising research agenda.

Future Research

We see several exciting directions for future research into necessary evils and interpersonal sensitivity. First, our model illuminates task and organizational factors that shape the experience of those who perform necessary evils. How each set of variables affects a performer's experience is a major avenue of future research, as is understanding the interaction among the vari-

ables and the relative weight each bears in determining both the intermediate cognitive and emotional states of performers and their motivational orientation and ultimate behavior. For example, what has the greatest impact on guilt, the ratio of harm to benefit, or the extent of a performer's involvement? Future research should systematically explore the devices individuals and organizations use to adjust and control the subjective experience of performing a necessary evil, as well as the conditions under which various devices—whether organizational, such as fragmentation, or individual, such as dissociation—will be used.

Although our focus has been on the internal experience of the performer, we have given less emphasis to a performer's ability to actively manage both the task and the thoughts and feelings it elicits. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) argue that individuals can play an active role in shaping the jobs they perform and the meaning those jobs have for them. With necessary evils, performers can construct the task so as to minimize or even amplify the guilt, sympathy, or performance anxiety they might otherwise experience. Examining these efforts, as well as the particular coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) professionals use to manage guilt, sympathy, and performance anxiety so that they stay at tolerable levels of intensity, is an area ripe for future research.

Individual differences may play a prominent role here. Can certain performers instinctively sense when the flame of sympathy, for example, needs to be lit, while simultaneously understanding when and how to distance and detach during moments of overwhelming emotional intensity? Novices and veterans are likely to differ markedly in how they experience necessary evils and in how they manage that experience. Over time and through multiple experiences with a particular type of necessary evil, individuals may develop specialized techniques for managing both their internal experience and their self-presentation. They may, for example, learn how to be externally sensitive, even when experiencing intense levels of internal psychological arousal (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Future research should unearth these impression management techniques (Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980) and identify the sorts of interventions that performers at dif-

ferent levels of skill and experience would benefit from most.

In future research scholars might also fruitfully explore the ways in which specific individual differences affect a performer's subjective experience of a necessary evil. Given their relevance to the necessary evils construct, four individual differences in particular stand out as promising candidates: proficiency, experience, self-efficacy, and authoritarianism. Individuals proficient in the technical, interpersonal (Goleman, 1995; Halpern, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and intrapersonal (Bagozzi, 1992; Gross, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mischel et al., 1996; Suls, David, & Harvey, 1996) skills required to perform a necessary evil are likely to be better equipped to handle the intensity of the internal drama and may well experience the mix of thoughts, emotions, motivations, and demands differently. The same may be true of those with extensive professional experience handling necessary evils, who become habituated to the task and its effects (Mineka & Thomas, 1999), and those with a strong sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Gist, 1987; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Those with authoritarian personalities (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1996) are likely to experience these tasks as more justifiable and themselves as less responsible, which might significantly influence their resulting behavior. Future research can illuminate how these individual differences shape performers' experiences and behavior.

Practical Contributions

As the context within which necessary evils occur, organizations are well positioned to influence the experience of performers along multiple dimensions. Yet simply being able to shape the context does not ensure that it is done in a successful manner. Consider, for example, two groups of physicians: a group of novices directly out of medical school and a group of seasoned veterans with years of clinical experience. Although both groups of doctors might perform the same types of necessary evils in the same organizational context, it would be safe to assume that their psychological experience, in isolation, would likely be quite different.

For the novices, the challenge for organizational designers might likely be one of reducing experienced emotional intensity. New to the ex-

perience of causing physical and emotional distress in the intimate atmosphere of a clinical setting, novices would likely experience high levels of emotional intensity—elevated guilt and sympathy from the raw experience of delivering painful consequences, and high levels of cognitive load and performance anxiety from the experienced difficulty of performing the technical demands of the task (Gawande, 2002). For these individuals, the challenge might be one of dampening emotional and cognitive experience to move it down to the tolerable range. To intervene effectively, organizations would have to manipulate antecedents of the performers' psychological experience in order to reduce its experienced intensity. Simply setting and articulating normative standards for interpersonal sensitivity would likely do little for individuals operating under these cognitively and emotionally taxing circumstances.

For veterans, however, the challenge would likely be quite different. With a somewhat dulled emotional connection to patients after years of clinical experience (Rosenbaum, 1988), and with an accompanying strong reflex to exercise control over the natural pull of emotions (Baumeister et al., 2000), veterans might benefit from an opposite intervention—one that accentuates, rather than deemphasizes, the palpability and intensity of a target's discomfort (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). While we have sketched it here with an example from health care, the same practical challenge faces a corporation ready to execute a layoff, where veteran managers are likely to experience the process of laying others off quite differently from those at the other end of the continuum of experience and proficiency.

Organizations are well positioned to have a powerful impact on the performance of necessary evils, but they must do so in a manner that takes into account the psychological dynamics outlined in our model. A better understanding of the ways in which contextual conditions affect a performer's subjective experience can enrich practitioners' ability to convert normative prescriptions into behavior. With this insight, interventions meant to increase the likelihood of interpersonally sensitive behavior can have their intended effect. For organizations to intervene effectively, they must do so in a way that takes into account the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral challenges of performing necessary

evils. By doing so, organizations can create the conditions and practices that enable individuals to meet the normative standards set for how they are to behave. The results of our analysis provide a useful framework for guiding these targeted interventions.

CONCLUSION

Most of us at some point in our professional careers will have to perform an act of unavoidable harm. For some, such as physicians or eviction officers, necessary evils are part of their daily lives. For others, they are less frequent. Although many of us know how we would *ideally* like to behave in these situations, little previous research has explored the difficulties involved in actually translating these ideals into effective behavior. By identifying and articulating the challenges involved from the performer's perspective, we provide a framework for helping individuals and organizations understand and manage necessary evils.

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