

Aristotelian Rhetoric as a Driver of Organizational Moral Change
How Logos, Pathos, and Ethos can Initiate, Scale Up, and Sustain Moral Change in Organizations*

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Abstract

Driven by the ambition to transform their organization as a force for social good, a rising number of employees have started grassroots movements to drive positive change from within their workplace (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Scully & Segal, 2002; One Young World, 2022). Surprisingly, research examining how this rising phenomenon contributes to shaping organizational moral boundaries is still relatively scarce. In this paper, we build on the theoretical framework of organizational moral change by Solinger et al. (2020) and expand it by bringing in Aristotelian deliberative rhetoric. Specifically, we explain how logos, pathos, and ethos appeals enable each phase of a moral change process: 1) *initiating*, 2) *scaling up*, and 3) *securing* moral change (cf. Solinger et al., 2020, p.510). We argue that it is by opening up, widening, and integrating the moral space that rhetoric contributes to bringing about a moral change. Theoretically, anchoring our perspective in Aristotle's moral philosophy, we demonstrate the importance of moral character in moving an organization and its members closer to the morally good life (Aristotle, 2004). Practically, our model offers a set of rhetorical tools that could be used to reduce moral muteness and establish durable patterns of morality in companies.

Keywords: organizational moral change, Aristotelian deliberative rhetoric, moral space, good life, moral character, virtue ethics

1. Introduction

Despite long-standing and tenuous calls from civil society to restore moral agency in corporate activities, we still observe huge gaps between discourses and practices in the business world (Brenkert, 2021; Pompe, 2013). Scandals around non-respect of human rights (e.g. child labor in Lindt & Sprüngli), consumers' safety (e.g. water scandal at Nestlé), abuses of employees' right to non-discrimination (e.g. lack of workforce diversity in Google), or disproportionate wage pays (e.g. extravagant CEOs' salaries in the tech industry) are recent examples of corporate discrepancies between stated moral aspirations and observed realities. As a response, a rising number of employees have started grassroots movements in their organizations to drive positive change from within (Briscoe & Gupta, 2020; White & Davis, 2015). Gathering employees across all levels, these movements shape organizational moral boundaries by providing spaces to deliberate on "what is good and bad, right and wrong, responsible and irresponsible, fair and unfair, or just and unjust" (Shadnam, 2020, p.14). Animated by a strong desire to drive real transformation, they want to end ethically troubling corporate practices and to make their companies better business citizens (Guynn, 2018; One Young World, 2022). For instance, while the democratic community "Siempact" in Siemens strives to raise awareness around a responsible use of technology and AI,¹ "Generation B" wants to secure a diverse workplace and culture of trust in Bühler.²

Principally investigated in the literature on insider social change agents which examines how some employees, the so-called *insider* or *workplace* activists (cf. Briscoe & Gupta, 2016 & 2020; Heucher et al., 2024), militate inside their organizations for or against a range of issues such as equal rights for women (Meyerson & Tompkins-Stange, 2007), non-discrimination of LGBT workers (Creed et al., 2002; Raeburn, 2004), or violations of human dignity (Gutierrez et al., 2010), studies have shown the effectiveness of this type of activism in bringing incremental, meaningful change from within a company. However, existing research lacks "full detail on the precise mechanisms of influence" and especially on "how persuasion tactics and other "soft" influence processes work" (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016, p.693 & 716). In particular, it has largely overlooked *how* employees challenge dominant ways of thinking in their organizations and engage other members in an organizational change process that defies current moral conventions (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Girschik et al., 2022; Van Den Broek et al., 2024; Weber & Waeger, 2017).

Relatedly, we note a dearth of theories on how a moral change can be enacted and unfold in an organizational setting (Brenkert, 2021). Indeed, we could identify only two conceptual works explaining how a process of moral change emerges within an organization. These are the "Process Model of Emergent Moral Leadership" by Solinger et al. (2020, p.509) and the "Theoretical Framework Model of Organizational Benevolence" by Beveridge and Höllerer (2023, p.7). Approaching morality from a psychological perspective, these models define several phases supporting a change in a "moral system" (cf. Solinger et al., 2020, p.504) or the development of a posture of benevolence (cf. Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023). Whilst both of them highlight persuasion or rhetoric as an important driver of change, none of them dives deep into how this influence mechanism precisely enables each of the phases. This is problematic because if insider activists want to bring alive the desired moral change, they need to know *how* to effectively convince other organizational members and rally them to their cause throughout the

¹ More information at <https://blog.siemens.com/ingenious-community/?u=siempact>

² More information at <https://www.buhlergroup.com/global/en/key-topics/generation-buhler.html>

change process. Given ongoing corporate scandals around a wide range of moral issues, finetuning our understanding of how alternative moral views might be brought to the front and lead to a wider change in organizational morality is not only timely but also utterly needed (Brenkert, 2021; Pompe, 2013; Vogel, 2005). This also echoes a recent call for papers “to explore the micro-foundations of corporate political work and its ethical connotations” (Van Den Broek et al., 2024, para 2).

Hence, with this paper, we aim to develop a theory of moral change by relying on rhetoric as an effective tool to promote change (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023; Wickert & De Bakker, 2018). Mostly building on the work of Solinger and co-authors (2020) who identified three successive phases on how to “spur change in moral systems”: *initiating, scaling up, and securing* (p.510), we enrich these ideal-typical phases by specifying the micro-rhetorical dynamics which are relevant to each of these phases. For that, we draw on Aristotle’s theory of deliberative rhetoric which provides a holistic and precise understanding of the channels through which persuasion operates. By his account, rhetoric relies on the interplay of three dynamics: *logos* (logical dynamic), *pathos* (emotional dynamic), and *ethos* (source dynamic) (Aristotle, 1991; Cheney et al., 2004). While *logos* concerns the rationality of the arguments advanced, *pathos* connects with the emotions of the audience and *ethos* serves to establish credibility by revealing essential traits of one’s moral character (Aristotle, 1991; Ballacci, 2019). Building on these insights, we therefore seek to answer the following question: *How do Aristotelian rhetorical appeals (logos, pathos, ethos) interplay to support different phases of a moral change process (initiate, scale up, and secure) within an organization?*

Focusing on the deliberative branch of Aristotelian rhetorical theory allows us to ground our understanding of morality in his philosophy of virtue ethics. Indeed, by bringing “the arts of politics and rhetoric to one another through the exercise of moral virtue (ethics) and excellence (*arête*) in persuasion (rhetoric)”, Aristotle establishes a strong link between his approach to morality and rhetoric (Cheney & Conrad, 2018, p.458). Being future-oriented, deliberative rhetoric aims to influence judgment about what *should* be done such as to live a good life and flourish (Aristotle, 1991; Ballacci, 2019; Yack, 2006). We extend this argument by introducing the idea of deliberative rhetoric as an effective medium to open up, widen, and integrate the moral space. Defined as the space where multiple views of the good interact, we argue that *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals together work to enlarge the common moral perspective by bringing in a new moral vision around a future course of action. Integrating these insights into the initiating, scaling up, and securing phases of a change in organizational morality, we develop our own *rhetorical process model of organizational moral change*. In this way, conceptualizing the micro-rhetorical foundations of an organizational moral change process from an Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective, we contribute to bringing Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric and his moral philosophy to the literature on insider social change agents and bottom-up organizational moral change. In particular, our model is the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates and explains the role of Aristotelian rhetoric in organizations and how different rhetorical appeals might be used by insider social change agents to diffuse new moral norms and values throughout an organization.

In the following, we start by reviewing how an organizational moral change has been defined and conceptualized as of today. We then turn to Aristotle’s theory of deliberative rhetoric, explain its core features (especially how it links to virtue ethics and the good life), and further elaborate on the complementary roles of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals in persuading an audience and shaping the moral space. Incorporating these insights into the three-phase model of Solinger et al. (2020), we develop

our own rhetorical process model of organizational moral change. Eventually discussing the theoretical and practical implications of our model, we conclude that if we are to durably change patterns of morality in organizations, we should pay more attention to the *whom* at the heart of organizational life.

2. Theoretical Background

The objective of this section is to prepare the ground for the rhetorical model of organizational moral change presented in the next section. We start by introducing the literature on organizational moral change. Mostly focusing on the conceptual works by Solinger et al. (2020) and Beveridge and Höllerer (2023), we explain how they have theorized a process of organizational moral change and introduce some of their key concepts that we later use in our model. Finding that both point to persuasion as an important mechanism driving a moral change process, we dive deeper into Aristotle's theory of deliberative rhetoric and shed light on how *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals dynamically shape each of the phases.

2.1. Theories Behind an Emergent Organizational Moral Change

Social and political trends strongly influence the moral challenges that organizations face. In social sciences, the word *moral* is often used to differentiate between principles, values, or norms which are other-oriented (e.g. social justice, responsibility) from those which are self- or instrumentally oriented (e.g. efficiency, profitability) (Haidt, 2008; Quissell, 2022, Van der Wal et al., 2006). Spanning multiple dimensions (ideals, principles, values, norms, etc.), morals are considered "an integral part of the fabric of corporate life (Dierksmeier, 2016a, 2016b)" and provide important direction to processes of organizing (Dierksmeier, 2024, p. 53; Meyer & Hühn, 2024). Subconsciously telling us what matters, they shape our judgments of "which behaviors are better than others, which goals are the most worthy, and what people should believe, feel, and do (Smith 2003)" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). They might also be invoked to limit instances of morally troubling practices or activities. For instance, cases of "sexual, gender and racial discrimination, uses of slavery, unjustified different levels of compensation, marketing techniques that harm consumers" might be condemned based on moral grounds (Brenkert, 2021, p.926).

Whereas recent social and political trends have led to new moral expectations, the phenomenon of workplace activism has been steadily rising these past years (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016 & 2020; Scully, 2017; SustainAbility, 2008). Characterized as a collective bottom-up change process, it has been argued that insider activism can significantly alter the role of business in society by reshaping "the landscape of thought and practice" within organizations (SustainAbility, 2008, p.43). For that, it relies on bringing to the fore alternative views in order to raise collective awareness around a variety of issues such as discrimination in the workplace or misleading business practices (Raeburn, 2004; Scully & Segal, 2002; White & Davis, 2015). Hence, viewed as a highly visible form of communicative action, it is theorized to principally operate through persuasion and educational efforts (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Weber & Waeger, 2017; Wickert & De Bakker, 2018). However, the capacity of insider activists to persuade other organizational members to shift their mindsets around a specific issue is not always thoroughly examined. According to Briscoe and Gupta (2016), studies on insider activism lack "full detail on the precise mechanisms of influence", especially regarding "how persuasion tactics and other "soft"

influence processes work” (pp.693 & 716). Furthermore, it has been recently noted that we still lack understanding of how workplace activists exert pressure on their companies to *radically* change their moral orientation (Girschik et al., 2022).

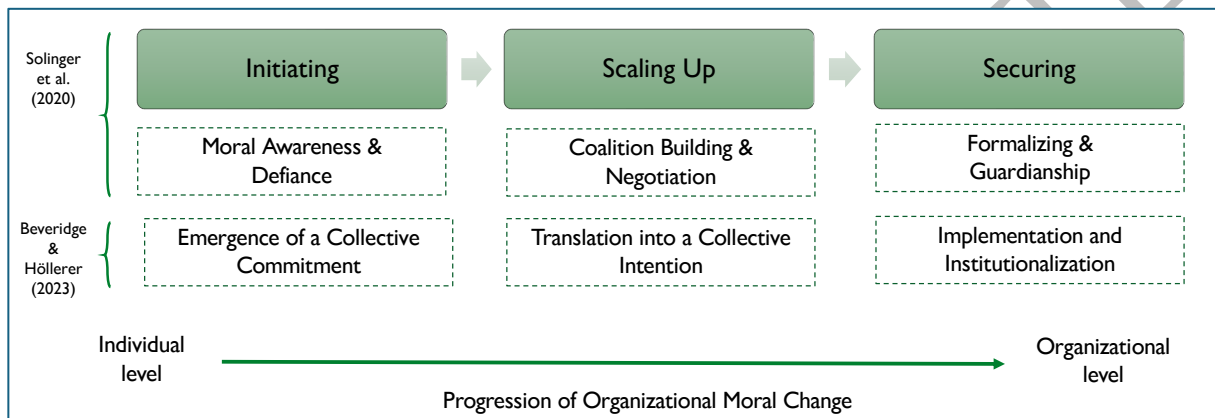
Indeed, it appears that there is a dearth of theories on how to alter the ideals and values that regulate corporate morality (Brenkert, 2021; Palanski et al., 2021). Principally investigated at the individual (e.g. moral psychology) and societal level (e.g. moral sociology), the phenomenon of moral change has received scant attention from organizational and business ethicist scholars. Whereas they have extensively considered what companies ought to do, therefore addressing the *why* and *what* of their business activities, they have significantly less addressed the question of *how* to enact a moral change (Brenkert, 2021). Although there is a growing body of research on how changes in values and/or norms occur in organizational or institutional settings (see Gehman, 2013; Gond et al., 2016; Gutierrez et al., 2010; Espedal, 2019; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015; Risi & Marti, 2022, etc.), most of these works are based on empirical observations “as opposed to more systematic and formal theory development across levels of analysis” (Solinger et al., 2020, p.505). Additionally, we notice that whereas some of these studies do not explicitly consider the moral dimension of values and norms, others might lack clarity on what they exactly mean with the term *moral*.

Located at the intersection of insider activism and organizational moral change, we could identify only two conceptual studies that have started to more comprehensively theorize how an emergent organizational moral change happens. These are the “Process Model of Emergent Moral Leadership” by Solinger et al. (2020, p.509) and the “Theoretical Framework Model of Organizational Benevolence” by Beveridge and Höllerer (2023, p.7), which both ground their understanding of morality in moral psychology. Hence, Solinger et al. (2020) approach the process as a shift in a moral system which, drawing on Haidt (2008, p.70), they define as the “interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible” (p.507). As to Beveridge and Höllerer (2023), they view it as the development of a posture of organizational benevolence, which they define as a stable behavioral disposition toward enhancing the well-being of external constituencies. From these definitions, they each develop their own model of moral change which, spanning from the individual to the organizational level, includes several phases that shed light on how organizational moral boundaries might be reweaved from the bottom up. Synthesizing these two models gives us a comprehensive overview of how a process of organizational moral change has been conceptualized as of today.

While the *initiating, scaling up, and securing* phases identified by Solinger et al. (2020, p.510) set the broader framework conditions for understanding the overall process, the model by Beveridge and Höllerer (2023) allows us to finetune our understanding of how some of these phases work. Starting with the individual level of analysis, Solinger et al. (2020) argue that a moral change is *initiated* when an individual becomes morally aware of a problematic issue in the organization and has the moral courage to voice their moral concerns to other members. As collective consciousness around a morally troubling issue rises, a feeling of collective commitment to solving it might slowly emerge, which sets up the ground for building a coalition (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023; Solinger et al., 2020). This propels the process to the *scaling-up* phase where momentum around the proposed change is expected to grow and

gradually spread throughout the entire organization as members deliberate over the best course of future action regarding its implementation (Solinger et al., 2020). If a common ground can be found, the collective commitment will in turn translate into a collective intention to bring about the desired change (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023). Once this happens, the *securing* phase begins. At this point, the objective is to preserve the newly reformed moral boundaries until they eventually become taken for granted. Stabilized into a new behavioral tendency, these boundaries become the shared reality that members “take to be right and true” in their work activities and interactions with others (Solinger et al., 2020, p.507; Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023). The whole process is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Process of Organizational Moral Change



Source: Own figure based on the works of Solinger et al. (2020) and Beveridge & Höllerer (2023)

Among the micro-mechanisms invoked to explain how a moral change might gradually propagate through different organizational levels, deliberative rhetoric or “communication aimed at persuading others” is repeatedly cited as an important enabler of the phases (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023, p.8; Solinger et al., 2020). Whereas Solinger et al. (2020) argue that the success of the change process partly relies on the persuasive skills of those who initiated and drive the change (p.513), Beveridge and Höllerer (2023) identify the “deliberative pathway” - characterized by rhetoric - as a principal channel of change (p.7). However, none of them dive deep into these micro-rhetorical mechanisms and how they dynamically support each of the phases of the moral change process. Building on the trend in management and organizational research that harnesses rhetoric as formative rather than reflective of a change process (cf. Browning & Hartelius, 2018; Cornelissen et al., 2015), we draw on Aristotle’s theory of deliberative rhetoric to further our understanding of how an organizational moral change unfolds from the bottom-up. Importantly, instead of grounding our perspective of morality in moral psychology, we rather conceptualize it from the view of Aristotle’s moral philosophy. Below, we explain the strong connection between Aristotle’s theories of virtue ethics and deliberative rhetoric and introduce the idea of rhetoric as an effective medium to work the moral space and move closer to the morally good life.

2.3. Aristotle’s Deliberative Rhetoric and the Good Life

Defined as the ability “to see the available means of persuasion in each case” (1991, Rh1355b), Aristotle emphasizes the importance of rhetoric in human affairs and, more particularly, the political

community. Allowing to reduce uncertainty in situations where no exact knowledge exists, its main function is to influence the judgment of others such that they can reach an intelligent decision and collectively move in the direction of probable moral truths (Ballacci, 2019; Cheney & Conrad, 2018). Hence, far from considering it as shallow or deceptive language, Aristotle rather considers rhetoric as a substantial concept serving to establish the shared moral perspectives that underlie and guide cooperative undertakings (Aristotle, 1991; Johnstone, 1980; Yack, 2006).

Distinguishing *deliberative* rhetoric from the *judicial* and *epideictic* branches, Aristotle describes the deliberative branch as serving to advise on future courses of action and persuading others that these actions will best serve them and the community (Cheney & Conrad, 2018; Yack, 2006). Referred to as “the ethical branch of politics”, it is the main medium through which individual moral views might be presented to others, reflected upon, and eventually integrated into the moral ideals and values of the community (Cheney & Conrad, 2018, p.458; Johnstone, 1980). Hence, acting as an intermediary between personal and collective morality, deliberative rhetoric creates a space “whereby moral visions are shared, modified, and fused into the communal moral principles that regulate our shared undertakings” (Johnstone, 1980, p.17). We argue that it is in this moral space that judgments about “what is good” and decisions about “what should be done” are taken.

Whilst Aristotle identifies the final objective of deliberative rhetoric as persuading an audience, he makes sure to emphasize that this should be done in accordance with the idea of enabling the good life, which designates a life of enjoyment in which happiness is desired for its own sake (Emel & Sungsoo, 2018). Founded on and guided by the moral principles developed in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2004), Aristotle holds the pursuit of the good life in constant consideration in his approach to rhetoric (Cheney & Conrad, 2018). More than an artful praxis (or *techne*), he considers deliberative rhetoric as a fundamental “political-ethical virtue” that allows the cultivation of virtuous individuals and moves them closer to the moral truths that ought to guide political activities (Aristotle, 1991; Ballacci, 2019). Hence, for Aristotle, “moral virtue, suasive [or suasive] speech, and the deliberative activities of the *polis*” are inseparable from each other (Johnstone, 1980, p.1). Based on that, we approach deliberative rhetoric as a substantial and holistic concept that pursues true flourishing as its ultimate goal and aims to convince others that some future action will best contribute to that aim (Aristotle, 1991).

2.3. Shaping the Moral Space: Roles and Dynamics of Logos, Pathos, and Ethos Appeals

Introducing the idea of the moral space, we define it as the place where an individual moral vision might be shared with others and, if sufficiently convincing, fused into the collective moral principles that regulate organizational life. We argue that this space is composed of three, interrelated dimensions: 1) people’s inner beings (e.g., individual moral beliefs, values, standards, or convictions); 2) social interactions between people; and 3) socio-cultural structures (e.g., ideologies/ collective belief systems, moral conventions/principles/standards/norms, etc.). Importantly, anchoring our definition of *morality* or *what is moral* in Aristotelian moral philosophy of virtue ethics, we approach it as the set of norms, principles, or values that are concerned with “what is good or acceptable” and aim to enhance human flourishing (Tsoukas, 2018, p.324). Being path-dependent upon virtue, this definition allows us to deviate from other understandings of morality which are guided by utilitarian or deontological principles. From a virtue ethics perspective, morality is first and foremost about supporting individuals to determine who they are and want to become rather than offering them some rules for short-term

decision-making (Hühn & Meyer, 2022). This also differs from definitions grounded in moral psychology where the main focus is on showing concern and respect for others rather than being oriented to the substantive idea of flourishing and examining *who* the person is.

Adopting a virtue ethics perspective on morality, we therefore argue that an organizational moral change process is accompanied by a shift in the moral space where an individual moral vision is integrated into the socio-cultural structures that regulate shared undertakings. In particular, we assume that it is through rhetoric that this space is opened up, widened, and incorporated into organizational moral boundaries. This affects all the dimensions of the moral space where opening up reveals a new moral vision that mirrors one's inner being, widening requires interactions to collectively reflect on this vision, and integrating directly affects pre-existing social structures as the vision rises in taken-for-grantedness. Hence, we argue that *substantial, deep* organizational moral change relies on a transformation at the individual, interactional, and structural levels. In other words, a successful organizational moral change process does not only imply new moral content, but goes along with a shift in how people see themselves and the world, which in turn affects their interactions with others and, ultimately, the broader socio-cultural structures that surround them. Based on these insights, we theorize logos, pathos, and ethos appeals as effective *causal mechanisms* leading to these multi-level transformations. We now briefly explain how these appeals function before developing a comprehensive rhetorical model of organizational moral change.

In his work *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three complementary ways (or species) through which one might *artfully* persuade others about what should be done: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals (Aristotle, 1991). Exclusively concerned with the *content* of the speech, logos appeals reflect the suitability and apparent truth of the argument presented (Aristotle, 1991; Holt & Macpherson, 2010). Reflecting deeper socio-cultural structures, logos appeals support complex cognitive processing where multiple options of the good might be compared and reflected upon. Hence, appealing to the intellect or reason of the listeners, the objective of these appeals is to help them decide on the best course of future action (Demirdöğen, 2010; Green, 2004).

These decision-making processes can be supported by pathos appeals whose objective is to ensure that the audience is in the right frame of mind when receiving the arguments and being presented with facts, evidence, or empirical proofs (Green, 2004; Hoefler & Green, 2016). As Aristotle (1991) explains, this is important because "we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile" (Rh1356a). Additionally, serving to create an emotional bond between the speaker and listeners, these appeals might also be used as a source of motivational energy to move them to action. Affecting the deepest feelings, desires, and passions that define a human being, pathos appeals might be used to capture the attention of the audience, raise their awareness, and eventually stimulate them to adopt a specific course of action (Baumlin & Scisco, 2018; Hallsby, 2022, p.44).

Lastly, ethos appeals function to create trust and credibility in the person speaking. Assumed to reflect one's moral values and beliefs, which are key to grasping one's moral vision, these appeals should convince others that the speaker is acting for the well-being of all rather than for private interests. Bringing moral character in the notion of agency, Aristotle argues that "narration ought to be indicative of character [ethike]" because the choices that a person makes are conditional on her moral character

and these decisions will subsequently be made apparent through speech (Aristotle, 1991, Rh 1417a). Even if not completely revealing, he considers that character emerging from speech is an “appropriate and trustworthy object of judgment because all the evidence for this ethos is directly accessible to the audience.” (Ballacci, 2019; Garver, 2013, p. 195). Hence, considering that rhetorical and moral excellence are two sides of the same coin, Aristotle preserves the connection between individual moral character and the persuasiveness of a speech (Heath, 2009; Johnstone, 1980; Ofori, 2019). For him, someone lacking virtuous intents and a sound knowledge of the good would quickly be discredited and logos and pathos appeals would lose their persuasive effects. As Garver (1994) puts it: “[R]eason does not persuade apart from character [...], [it] persuades because we think it is a sign of character” (p.147).

Although these three artistic proofs - logos, pathos, and ethos - might be examined one by one, they are complementary to each other and need to be used in combination to be effective. For instance, in the presence of contradictory logics, logos appeals might prove insufficient and might need to be supplemented by pathos and ethos appeals which can facilitate adherence to the arguments presented and enhance their credibility (Silince & Golant, 2018). Alternatively, the presence of logos and ethos appeals serves to ensure that pathos appeals are not directed toward undermining nor manipulating the judgment of others (Hühn & Meyer, 2023). As to ethos appeals, infusing the whole rhetorical dynamics with moral substance, they should guarantee that logos and pathos appeals are directed toward good ends. These complementarities are also reflected in their own dynamics where logos, pathos, and ethos appeals are expected to vary in the durability of their persuasive effects. Whereas pathos appeals might elicit powerful reactions in the listeners, their effects are likely to be relatively short-lived as emotions only last a certain time (Green, 2004; Green et al., 2008; Hoefler & Green, 2016). In contrast, involving more complex cognitive processing, logos appeals should have relatively longer persuasive effects. Lastly, considered the most potent form of persuasion, ethos appeals are theorized to durably affect the moral viewpoints of others, thereby having “the most enduring impact on taken-for-grantedness” (Aristotle, 1991; Green, 2004, p.660). In the following, we explain in more detail how these appeals interact to form an effective system of persuasion that shapes the moral space and propels an organizational moral change forward.

3. Towards a Rhetorical Process Model of Organizational Moral Change

In this section, we theorize how different combinations of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals might bring to the fore alternative moral ideals within an organization. We do so by principally building on the *initiating*, *scaling up*, and *securing* phases of the process model of emergent moral leadership by Solinger et al. (2020) and importing some insights from the model of organizational benevolence by Beveridge and Höllerer (2023). Based on this theoretical basis, we dive deep into the micro-rhetorical causal mechanisms underlying each phase. More specifically, applying our assumption that logos, pathos, and ethos form an effective system of persuasion that transforms the moral space (see Section 2.3), we develop our own rhetorical process model of organizational moral change. In this model, we seek to elucidate which appeal(s) and combination(s) thereof should prevail at different stages of a moral change process. Contrary to studies that emphasize their sequential use (e.g. Green, 2004; Hoefler & Green, 2016; Holt & Macpherson, 2010), we rather emphasize their simultaneous interplays in effectively shaping the moral space and bringing a process of organizational moral change forward. As

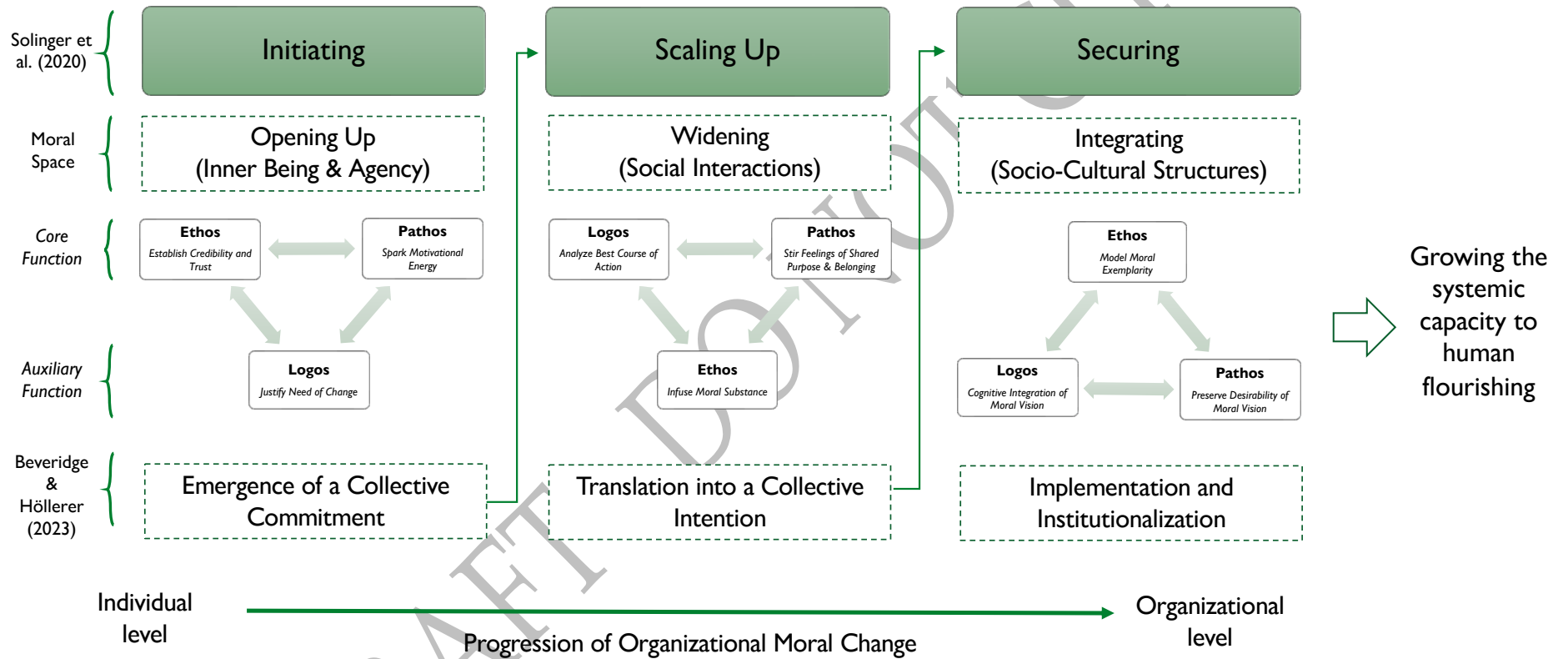
depicted in Figure 2 below, we put at the top the appeals that we expect to be relatively more central in enabling a specific phase whereas the ones represented at the bottom should have a more supportive role, mostly serving to reinforce the persuasive effects of the presumed dominant appeals.

3.1. Phase 1: Initiating – Opening Up the Moral Space

We argue that a process of organizational moral change “always starts with an individual questioning means and/or ends (Schön & Argyris, 1996, p. XII) and then trying to persuade others that the change would be beneficial” (Hühn & Meyer, 2023, p.9). As evidenced in Solinger et al.’s model (2020), this might arise when an organizational member experiences a dissonance between deeply anchored personal values and what they observe in their company which might in turn trigger a process of questioning existing structures (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Creed et al., 2003). For example, this could be the case if someone is strongly attached to the value of justice or equality and notices the presence of excessive and unjustified pay gaps. We additionally identify two other situations that could start a moral change process. The first one is when the meaning of some moral issues is vague or uncertain, leading to unclarity regarding the scope of responsibility and moral principles that should apply (Sonenshein, 2006; Reinecke et al., 2017). The second one would arise when there is a “moral void” which is characterized by the inexistence of a suitable moral orientation regarding a specific issue (Kaptein et al., 2019, p.1141; Spinosa et al., 2023). For instance, this might be the case with the introduction of new technologies in companies, such as AI, where it has not yet been reflected upon and decided which moral standards should be used. Relatedly, we assume that whether moral awareness arises when facing these situations directly depends on the moral character of organizational members. In particular, we expect that those who have higher levels of moral development will be more prone to recognize and identify a moral issue (higher moral sensitivity) and take action “to bring the current state of affairs with some valued moral standpoints” (high moral commitment; Tanner & Christen, 2014, p.6).

The moral space opens up as the individual identifies a moral issue, voices her moral concern to others, and offers an alternative moral vision. At this point, we expect ethos appeals to prevail. Partly mirroring her moral values and beliefs, which are key to understanding her personal vision, we expect these appeals to help establish initial credibility in the person speaking and to lay down the foundations for further trust building (Chance, 1992). Because exposing one’s moral perspective is a risky endeavor, especially if it goes against collective belief systems, speaking up should simultaneously demonstrate one’s moral courage and motivation to act, thereby reinforcing positive impressions of one’s moral character. Establishing hold and confidence in the person disclosing her moral beliefs and convictions should in turn raise the curiosity of other organizational members regarding the alternative moral vision offered to them. Once having caught their attention and gained their confidence, pathos appeals should be used to “mobilize social energies” and overcome the inertia inherent to any change process (Cintron, 2010, p. 103 cited in Sharp, 2019, p.361). Whereas triggering positive emotions such as hope, pride, and/or optimism might contribute to reducing the fear of moving to the unknown, using negative emotions such as suspicion, disgust, and/or indignation helps to create dissatisfaction with the current status quo. Hence, activating “fundamental psychological processes”, these appeals engender a sense of urgency and desire to move to a new moral state. Pathos appeals are also important to ensure that

Figure 2: Rhetorical Process Model of Organizational Moral Change



Source: Own figure based on Solinger et al. (2020), Beveridge & Höllerer (2023), and Aristotle's rhetorical theory (Aristotle, 1991)

individuals are in the right frame of mind when being exposed to the arguments defending the new moral perspective and the feasibility of its implementation. Although we theorize logos appeals to have a subsidiary function in the initiating phase, these are nonetheless required to explain what is deficient in the current system and how to remedy it. Presenting a factual point of view through the use of appropriate evidence and empirical proofs should strengthen the persuasive powers of ethos and pathos appeals. Reasoning others around the where, why, and how the existing moral status quo is inadequate or deficient should support the creation of a sense of dissatisfaction with it and enhance their understanding of the need to solve what is currently problematic (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). At the same time, presenting sound arguments around the benefits of moving to an alternative moral order could enhance feelings of excitement and hope around the idea of moving closer to the good life and build further trust in that endeavor.

Summing up, we expect a sound combination of ethos and pathos appeals to dominate the dynamics of the initiating phase where the introduction of a novel moral perspective opens up the moral space. Whilst ethos appeals are essential to establish trust and credibility in the person revealing her moral perspective, the emotional energy generated through pathos appeals enables to overcome collective inertia and fear of change, thereby gradually moving organizational members into the moral space. From this interplay of ethos-pathos appeals supported by logos appeals should eventually emerge a *collective commitment* to challenge the incumbent status quo and bring about moral change (Green, 2004; Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023).

3.2. Phase 2: Scaling Up – Widening the Moral Space

The main objectives of this phase are twofold. The first one is to widen the moral space and build a community of minds who commit to living through the proposed moral vision. For the moral change process to scale up, it is important to rally enough organizational members and ensure that they individually develop a deep and genuine commitment to integrating this new worldview as part of their identity and everyday work activities. As Beveridge and Höllerer (2023) explain, “[a] collective commitment can only be credible if significant proportions of members are personally committed. When it becomes evident that this is not the case, a commitment will cease to function effectively and will disappear.” (p.6). The second objective consists of finding a moral consensus around the best future course of action. Creating a “collective sense of appropriateness” around what should be done should eventually give rise to a *collective intention* to take action and concretize the now widely shared moral vision, even despite potential barriers (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023).

Whereas the initiating phase was primarily concerned with exposing to others some private ideas and values they might not have otherwise considered, thereby allowing for the introduction of a new moral perspective in the moral space, the scaling-up phase aims to instill a sense of responsibility for and possibility of change in the nascent community of like-minded individuals. We theorize logos and pathos appeals to play a dominant role in that endeavor. Engaging in a nuanced rational discussion around the benefits and drawbacks of shifting to a new moral order while addressing its sensitive and emotional aspects should support the reconciliation of multiple, potentially conflicting, views of the good. Applying a logos-pathos constellation should therefore solidify the collective attention and awareness obtained earlier while contributing to widening the moral space by personally convincing

members to enlarge their own moral perspectives such that they become genuinely motivated to jointly reach the new moral target.

Affecting individuals' cognition which, in turn, affects their behavior, logos appeals play multiple roles in this phase. Firstly, creating a deep logical understanding of the importance and urgency of moral change, these appeals enable organizational members to reflect upon the attributes and advantages of the proposed vision for moral change and gradually convince them of its significance. In other words, they need to develop a sound understanding of the necessity and value of moral change before devoting themselves to the change proposition. Secondly, logos appeals have an essential enabling function in *moral problem solving* which might be defined as the faculty to "develop and determine a morally satisfactory course of action that resolves conflicting tendencies" (Tanner & Christen, 2014, p.5). Connecting with the moral dimension of the future, these appeals allow to examine and weigh the implications, values, and norms associated with different moral visions and, based on this reflection process, identify the best moral option. Here the subtlety lies in finding some common ground between the pre-existing moral beliefs and values of the audience whilst simultaneously challenging them with a different moral perspective (Ballacci, 2019). It is also about organizing conflicting values and perspectives into a hierarchic structure such as to solve the conflicts that prevent value alignment and tangible action. From this prioritization process, members should start to view some values as more important than others and identify more strongly with them. This rising adherence to the prioritized value or set of values should eventually reinforce their disposition to pursue the course of action that is the most coherent and consistent with the vision supporting these values (Sharp, 2019). Thirdly, logos appeals should be used to convince others of the *feasibility* of pursuing the selected course of action. As Auger (2014) explains, "[e]ven if the value of an outcome is very high it will not motivate individuals as long as they do not believe that the outcome can be produced by their efforts" (p. 585). Thus, for members to seriously commit to the moral change process and take action, they need to be convinced of both the value of the new moral vision and the possibility of its realization.

Pathos appeals are also important as "[e]motions imbue alternative courses of action under consideration with valence", thereby facilitating decision-making processes (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023, pp.11-12). Indeed, from an Aristotelian perspective, reason and emotion are indissociable from each other and equally contribute to selecting the best moral option (Hühn & Mandray, 2023). Whereas logos appeals can be associated with arguments that support the feasibility of the change initiative, pathos appeals ensure its *desirability* by eliciting positive emotions such as optimism and excitement in addition to stirring "feelings of belonging, responsibility, and shared purpose" (Sharp, 2019; Winton, 2013, p.165). Hence, conferring a sense of hope and community, these appeals are vital in sustaining collective momentum and engagement in the moral change movement. They are important providers of motivational energy for pursuing the work undertaken in the initiating phase and realizing the new shared moral vision (Bain et al., 2021; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018).

As to ethos appeals, we expect them to have an auxiliary function in this phase where they mostly contribute to enabling and creating a moral consensus "after having reflected on the telos and how to move towards it" (Hühn & Meyer, 2023, p. 10). These appeals should resonate with the emerging moral community and successfully unite them in jointly achieving the new moral vision. Listening to and synthesizing various individual moral objectives and perspectives into a unified shared moral vision that simultaneously determines and contributes to enhancing the systemic capacity for human

flourishing should guarantee that members develop a deep and genuine commitment to the envisioned moral change. Hence, infusing the whole persuasion process with moral substance, ethos appeals should counteract any potential manipulative tendencies of logos and pathos appeals and ensure that individuals integrate the grassroots for moral rather than instrumental reasons. In other words, they should motivate them “to bring current state of affairs into line with some valued moral standpoints” because they truly believe that this is the *good* or *acceptable* thing to do rather than unreflectively adhering to them out of social or instrumental pressures. Transcending the individual, we argue that ethos appeals affect the inner beings of other organizational members, inspiring them to become the kind of “person who lives a life expressive of the virtues” (McAlear, 2008, p.49 cited in Tsoukas, 2018, p.328). We further assume that this individual moral transformation is essential to developing a collective sense of appropriateness based on substantial, moral grounds and its eventual translation into a collective intention to act on the new shared moral vision.

To conclude, we suggest that logos and pathos appeals have a primary function in expanding the moral space and scaling up the moral change process in the organization. Whereas logos appeals allow to make sense of and analyze the best moral option in addition to emphasizing the feasibility of its implementation, pathos appeals help to enhance its desirability and support the formation of a collective sense of appropriateness. Relatively less dominant in this phase, ethos appeals should be such that they resonate with the growing moral community and ensure that members effectively integrate the new shared moral vision into their own moral worldview. This phase closes once individuals become animated by a strong collective intention to bring about moral change within their organization.

3.3. Phase 3: Securing – Integrating the Moral Space

Whilst the initiating and scaling-up phases were oriented toward reforming the incumbent moral status quo, the securing phase aims at maintaining the new organizational moral boundaries by formally and durably integrating them into the pre-existing socio-cultural structures. This is achieved through the following two successive steps: 1) formally integrate the widened moral space in the organization and 2) preserve it by having those who initiated the change process as moral exemplars. We posit that the moral change process eventually concludes when the moral tensions, unclarity, or voids at the origin of the moral change are resolved and that a temporary equilibrium around the new moral order is reached. This occurs when the reformed socio-cultural structure becomes taken for granted and constitutes the new shared organizational reality that members “take to be right and true” in their work activities and interactions with others (Solinger et al., 2020, p.507; Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023). In our rhetorical process of organizational moral change, this would correspond to a reality where an organization and its members have moved closer to moral truth characterized by an improvement in the systemic capacity to flourish. Rather than simply representing what behaviors are “right” or “wrong”, the moral standards now governing organizational life should illuminate what is good or acceptable and support members in becoming virtuous individuals themselves (Newstead et al., 2021; Tsoukas, 2018).

We expect all three appeals to have an important role in this last phase. However, we preconize ethos appeals to have a relatively more dominant function as they will guarantee that the new patterns of morality endure over time. We theorize that logos appeals should prevail at the beginning of the formalization procedure where, once having diffused throughout the organization, the new collective

moral vision is progressively integrated into the shared “moral code, or system, of thinking and talking about issues” (Gehman et al., 2013; Solinger, 2020, p.507). Appealing to the intellect of organizational members should ensure that they cognitively process the new moral conventions until they become naturally present in their daily work practices and interactions. In turn, the more salient these principles become in their minds, the more accessible they will be, and the more likely they will apply them in their activities and refer to them in their interactions with each other, thereby reinforcing their presence and acceptance in the organization. However, once the reformed organizational moral boundaries have become completely taken for granted, meaning that members have fully internalized them, logos appeals alone are unlikely to be effective anymore and should now be continuously enforced by pathos appeals. Eliciting positive emotions such as elevation and pride should be used to develop a shared emotional bond around the new moral status quo and ensure that it continues to be perceived as desirable over time. Importantly, these emotions should keep and nurture members’ moral motivations to continuously strive towards moral excellence and contribute to the common moral vision of human flourishing.

Whereas using both logos and pathos appeals allows to formalize the new shared moral vision by securing both cognitive and emotional adherence to it, we argue that this vision will only be truly sustainable if organizational members develop a substantive, moral connection to it. In other words, their willingness to apply these new moral principles should come out of a sincere commitment rather than being enforced out of coercive or normative external pressures (Basu & Palazzo 2008; Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023). We preconize that ethos appeals should increase the probability that members substantially integrate the values and ideals defended by the new shared vision. In particular, constructing an ethos of moral exemplarity should be a source of inspiration and provide guidance on how to actually live this moral worldview. Hence, now tasked with guarding the moral boundaries of the transformed socio-cultural structure, those who initiated the moral change process should establish trust and credibility in their new role as moral role models. Having themselves become “a focal point of influence (a ‘beacon of recognition’)”, they should persist in exemplifying their moral commitment and high level of personal integrity (Solinger et al., 2020, p.518). Partly revealed through ethos appeals, their moral excellence should eventually have enduring persuasive effects on other members, deeply affecting their ambition to become virtuous individuals and reach the common objective of human flourishing.

We assume that a cycle of organizational moral change is terminated once the moral issue (moral dissonance, uncertainty, or gap) at the origin of the change process is solved and the modified socio-cultural structure becomes widely taken for granted. While we theorize that all three types of appeals have a significant role to play, we expect ethos appeals to dominate in the securing phase as they should ensure that the new organizational moral boundaries are based on substantive, moral grounds. More precisely, we view this longevity as being heavily reliant upon the moral character of change proponents and their capacity to persistently inspire others in collectively moving towards moral excellence and the “flourishing of the good life” in their organization (Holt, 2006, p.1669; Hühn & Meyer, 2023).

All in all, our rhetorical process model of organizational moral change demonstrates how logos, pathos, and ethos appeals should be used to initiate, scale up, and secure an organizational moral

change. In particular, approaching Aristotle's deliberative rhetoric as an effective medium to open up, widen, and integrate the moral space, our model sheds light on the micro-rhetorical foundations that enable each phase of a process of moral change within an organization. Theorizing how each of these appeals works and dynamically interplay with each other illuminates one of the causal mechanisms that explain moral shifts at multiple levels (inner beings, social interactions, and socio-cultural structures) in a company. In the initiating phase, we assume that a combination of ethos and pathos appeals should contribute to opening up the moral space by effectively introducing a new individual moral perspective. Combined, these appeals should help to raise collective awareness around the need to challenge a morally troubling status quo and establish trust and credibility in the person proposing an alternative moral vision. In turn, using a combination of logos and pathos appeals should help to widen the moral space and scale up the moral vision across multiple organizational levels. Together, they should enable the translation from a collective commitment to bring about moral change to a collective intention to actually take action. Finally, enabling the forging of genuine bonds to the substantive idea of human flourishing as the ultimate goal, we posit that ethos appeals characterized by moral exemplarity should be relatively more prevalent in the securing phase. A cycle is eventually completed once the moral tension, ambiguity, or void is solved and the new common moral vision is formally integrated into organizational moral boundaries and gradually becomes taken for granted among organizational members. Arguing that to be sustainable in the long term, an organizational moral change process should affect all the dimensions of the moral space, we expect that individuals change their perspectives on how they see themselves and their role in the organization whilst their interactions with others become guided by principles such as tolerance, kindness, empathy, care, respect and concern for each other. This should come hand in hand with a transformation of the socio-cultural structure characterized by an augmented systemic capacity for human flourishing.

4. Discussion and Implications

Despite being at the heart of any process of organizing, there is surprisingly little research theorizing on a moral change at the organizational level. In the literature on insider social change agents, we note that, as of today, only two studies have started to theoretically conceptualize the idea of a bottom-up organizational moral change: the "Process Model of Emergent Moral Leadership" by Solinger et al. (2020, p.509) and the "Theoretical Framework Model of Organizational Benevolence" by Beveridge and Höllerer (2023, p.7). However, both of them anchor their understanding of morality in moral psychology where what is moral mostly amounts to showing values that demonstrate an orientation toward others. By contrast, our model is grounded in Aristotle's moral philosophy of virtue ethics which emphasizes the importance of individual moral character and elaborates on the idea of human flourishing as the ultimate end of any activity (Hühn & Meyer, 2023). Specifically, applying his theory of deliberative rhetoric which is itself path-depend upon virtue and human flourishing, allows to dive deeper into the causal mechanisms enabling substantial moral change. In this section, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our approach and, more generally, what our rhetorical process model of organizational moral change entails for researchers and practitioners.

4.1. Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Contributing to the nascent literature on emerging moral change in organizations, our paper is the first to conceptualize it from an Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective. Whereas Aristotle's theory of deliberative rhetoric enables us to investigate in depth the micro-rhetorical dynamics propelling a moral change forward, its close tie to virtue ethics highlights the importance of individual moral character in durably shifting organizational moral boundaries. The theoretical insights derived from our model therefore precise our understanding of how persuasion mechanisms work and how they might be used by insider social change agents to challenge current moral conventions in their organizations and institutionalize alternative moral perspectives. More particularly, we assume that it is through ethos appeals that moral substance is infused into the whole change process and that organizational members develop a genuine moral motivation to bring about moral change at multiple levels.

Relatedly, the first main theoretical contribution of our model is its emphasis on the role of individual moral character in shaping both the moral space and the organizational moral change process, thereby bringing a deeper conception of agency. Whilst ethos appeals might be considered as "a basic situational feature, which structures the whole rhetorical dynamics", we extend this argument by emphasizing that it is simultaneously the pivotal factor that encourages organizational members to join the coalition and adhere to the proposed change for moral rather than instrumental reasons (Heracleous & Klaering, 2014, p.152). Persuaded by the virtuous intents and habitual disposition towards the good of change proponents, members rally the cause because they trust that these individuals are leading them toward what is good. As a result, we expect members to substantially adhere to the moral cause and form deep, personal bonds to the proposed moral vision. Embedded with "volitional dedication and responsibility", these substantive bonds should eventually reinforce the strength of a collective commitment and raise its likelihood of surviving and morphing into a collective intention (Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023; Klein et al. 2012, p. 130). In short, we see the success of a moral change process to be heavily reliant on the moral character of individuals who initiate the change and their capacity to convince others of their high levels of authenticity and personal integrity. Standing out with their strong moral character, they should be a source of inspiration to other members, thereby spreading moral excellence throughout the organization. Based on this insight, we suggest that future research investigates more closely the moral essence of these employees who attempt to implement the good life in their workplace. Simultaneously, we call for more research that also considers human *being* as integral to human agency.

Another implication of our work is the necessity for research to shift its focus from examining morality as "doing the moral thing for some instrumental organizational end" (i.e. instrumental understanding of morality) to morality as "doing the moral thing as an end in itself" (i.e. immanent understanding of morality) (Mayer et al., 2019, p.1072). Put differently, management and organizational scholars should move away from an understanding of morality as good for the bottom line and instead refer to morality as being and doing good for its own sake. As Cheney and Conrad (2018) put it,

"[s]uch a perspective undermines strictly "business cases": ethics can no longer be cast as means to image management that are separate from and thus undermined by strategic ends or diminished to a secondary consideration in organizational strategy—one that competes with objectives of efficiency, profitability, or growth." (p.460).

We therefore suggest more studies that adopt this viewpoint and deviate from the overriding instrumental business logic which contributes to perpetuating the business cases. Rather, we need more theories that encourage organizations and their employees to shift away from this logic and encourage faith in one that aims to achieve what is good as an end in itself (Barnard, 1938; Tsoukas, 2018). In turn, doing so could address recent concerns in the business ethics field which deplore the fact that the discipline has moved too far away from its philosophical foundations (Jasinska, 2024; Koehn, 2024; Meyer & Hühn, 2024). They notably trace the ineffectiveness of current studies in solving the discrepancy between what companies ought to be doing and their actual activities to an overemphasis on scientific rationality. As a remedy, they claim for a stronger anchoring of business ethics research in ancient moral philosophy where “sensitive, discursive, and moral elements” also have their place (Hühn & Mandray, 2023, p.1). We similarly call for more theories that incorporate these elements and fundamentally reconnect to our human nature. As Dierksmeier (2024) puts it, [b]usiness is, after all, but humans exchanging goods and services with humans” (p.53), and acknowledging this is essential if we are to move in the direction of true flourishing in organizations. Hence, we hope that the introduction of new theoretical perspectives on how to conduct business could eventually lead to better practices and, consequently, reduce the frequency of moral lapses in the corporate world.

4.2. Practical Implications

Practically, we want to highlight the importance of carefully assessing the *who* behind a moral change process. This is important because morality is at the heart of corporate life and any alteration in collective moral ideals, values, and norms can have significant repercussions on processes of organizing. From our model, assuming that individual moral character can significantly shape organizational morality, we argue that it is crucial for companies to evaluate early on the intentions and sound understanding of the good of employees who start grassroots movements within their walls. Whereas we generally view the emergence of corporate moral activism from a good eye, especially if it is directed towards solving morally problematic issues and promoting what is *good*, we recognize that a moral change can also be significantly destabilizing for organizations and their members. However, we preconize that if members leading the change simultaneously act as moral role models to others, companies could only benefit from these changes. As already noticed thirty years ago by Meyerson and Scully (1995), workplace activists represent “a unique source of vitality, learning, and transformation” for the company (p.598). We further add that, if imbued with moral character, these activists could be a major source of inspiration for other employees and motivate them to practice moral excellence in their daily work activities. Thus, in light of evolving social expectations where individuals increasingly care about working for *morally good* organizations in which they can live up to their potential and do good through their work, we expect that organizations could tremendously benefit from moral workplace activism (Erzikova & Martinelli, 2023; One Young World, 2022).

Another practical implication from our theory is that, if we are to reduce the moral lapses that we continue to observe in the business world, we need to set up measures that would counteract “moral muteness” in organizations. Defined as the act of “systematically deterring individuals from framing issues in moral terms”, we argue that the silencing of moral ideals and values can be highly detrimental to companies (Mayer et al., 2019, p.1059; Pompe, 2013; Quissell, 2022). Through our model, we sought to demonstrate the importance of allowing employees to speak up about what they view as morally

problematic in the organization and raise awareness about it. In particular, by opening up the moral space with their own vision of the good, we have shown how they can enlarge the worldviews of others and eventually shift their mindsets such as to bring about the desired moral change. Given that workplace activists usually lack the financial means or institutional support to advance their change efforts, we advance deliberative rhetoric as an efficient and cost-less means to work the moral space and bring moral ideas to life (Meyerson & Tompkins-Stange, 2007; Raeburn, 2004). In particular, the model that we develop provides moral activists with a palette of widely employable rhetorical tools that they could resort to 1) initiate a moral change process, 2) generate collective momentum around it, and 3) ensure the durability of the reformed moral order over time. More precisely, when starting the change process, we recommend that they use a sound combination of ethos and pathos appeals in order to secure their credibility and generate the emotional energy necessary to collectively move away from a problematic moral status quo. In turn, we advise using logos and ethos appeals when scaling up the change as they have longer persuasive effects and can together support the establishment of a unifying vision of the good. Once having brought to life this vision through an interplay of the three types of appeals, ethos appeals should ultimately be used to secure enduring patterns of moral excellence in the organization.

Going a step further, we recommend the creation of organizational safe spaces where moral issues could be brought up and members could exchange their moral views around particular topics (Brenkert, 2021; Gaventa, 2006). Serving to create and maintain a certain critical consciousness within the organization, these spaces could nurture moral reflection and support group deliberation in bringing about better business practices, solving moral conflicts, or promoting new ways of thinking (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Hühn & Mandray, 2023). While encouraging employees who have a sound vision of the good to speak up, these spaces could simultaneously enhance the chances that alternative or minority voices are heard and potentially integrated into the moral principles regulating corporate life. In turn, listening to their members' moral claims and acting on them would guarantee that organizations meet the contemporary aspirations of the environment in which they evolve as well as of their workforce, thereby diminishing cases of cognitive dissonance. As a result, if the company they work for is aligned with their own moral values and ideals, employees are likely to be more engaged and stay longer. Additionally, recognizing the diversity of moral opinions and staying aware of them could help companies to better anticipate the emergence of new moral issues and timely respond to them. Overall, as organizations continue to face new and changing moral issues, we argue that understanding how organizational morality might be successfully adjusted and durably integrated within business practices will become utterly needed in the coming years. This knowledge might even prove pivotal to maintaining their *raison-d'être* over time (Brenkert, 2021; Kaptein, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Guided by the research question of how deliberative rhetoric can foster an organizational moral change, we have answered it by operationalizing the *initiating*, *scaling up*, and *securing* phases of the model by Solinger et al. (2020) with the help of Aristotle's *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* appeals. We have theorized on how the latter should be used to open up, widen, and integrate the moral space such that an alternative moral vision might be introduced in a company and diffused in the form of new shared

moral ideals and values. Our theoretical approach is unique in viewing an organizational moral change from an Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective and employing his theory of deliberative rhetoric as a means to work the moral space and enact a moral change. Addressing recent concerns around the dearth of theories examining moral change at the organizational level (cf. Brenkert, 2021), our rhetorical process model of organizational moral change contributes to partly filling this gap. It notably contributes to recent research that has started to conceptualize how moral change happens inside organizations and how persuasion is involved (cf. Beveridge & Höllerer, 2023; Solinger et al., 2020). Our work goes a step further by exploring in depth the micro-level rhetorical dynamics underpinning various stages of a moral change process and introducing the concept of the moral space where individual moral character is theorized to affect shared perceptions of morality which, subsequently, lead to a shift in organizational moral boundaries.

Our anchoring in Aristotle's moral understanding of rhetoric enables us to reinvigorate business ethics studies with the frequently overlooked "sensitive, discursive, and moral" dimensions (Hühn & Mandray, 2023, p.1). In particular, expecting that the sustainability of moral change efforts is likely to strongly depend on the moral character of those driving the process, it will be important for future research to move beyond the *how* to more closely investigate the *who* behind these moral change initiatives. Better grasping the essence of these members should eventually allow organizations to identify early on whether they should fear or embrace the rise of grassroots movements within their walls. If companies can be convinced that the *who* behind the moral change initiatives have high levels of personal integrity and truly want to do good in the organization and beyond, then we recommend that they encourage them and enhance the visibility of their efforts in the organization. Placed in positions where they would act as role models to other members, they should become a source of inspiration to cultivate moral excellence in daily work activities, thereby leading to enduring patterns of human flourishing in organizations.

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