Exploring factors affecting moral judgment of character and action

Marek Vranka[1,2] & Štěpán Bahník[3]

[1] Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, vranka.marek@gmail.com, @mVranka, www.pless.cz/en
[2] Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
[3] Faculty of Business Administration, University of Economics, Prague, Czech Republic, bahniks@seznam.cz, @bahniks, www.bahniks.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- More than 5,000 participants judged morality of a decision and the character of the decision maker solving a dilemma in a medical setting.
- We failed to replicate results of Uhlmann et al. (2013).
- You can propose your own hypothesis that could be tested with our data!

METHODS

Participants and procedure

5534 participants read about a senior doctor deciding whether to spend money on an operation that would save one currently dying child or buy a new medical equipment that would save more lives in the future. In a fully factorial 3x2x2x2x2 design we manipulated **how many lives will be saved by the new equipment**, **the doctor's personal interest**, **speed of the doctor's decision**, **the doctor's decision**, and **the object of moral judgment**.

Materials

A senior doctor at an Indian hospital has to decide whether to save a life of an ill boy with an operation for 50 millions rupees, or whether to use the money to buy an equipment which will save **5 / 50 / 500** lives in the future.
The doctor's gravely ill son will be among the saved people. / The ill boy is the doctor's son.

The doctor decides **after a long hesitation / fast** to **save the boy / buy the equipment**.

Do you believe that the doctor decided correctly from the moral point of view?
(1 - very wrongly, 7 - very correctly)

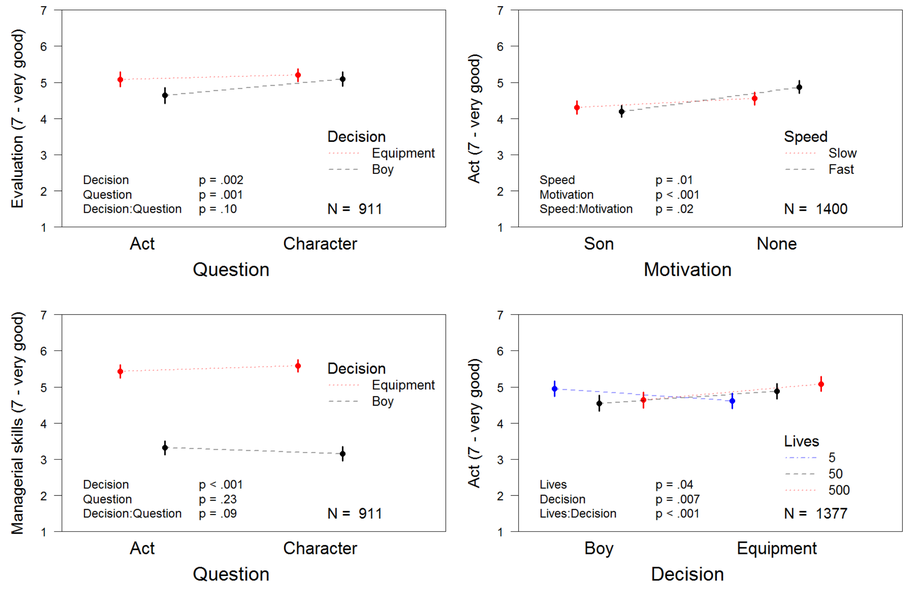
How would you evaluate the doctor's character?
(1 - very bad, 7 - very good)

How would you evaluate the doctor's managerial skills?
(1 - very bad, 7 - very good)

RESULTS

General design of our study was modeled after Uhlmann et al. (2013) who found that a hospital administrator who decided not to save a child and instead bought needed hospital equipment was seen as making a morally praiseworthy decision, but also as deficient in moral character. However, we were not able to replicate the finding: there was no interaction between the decision and whether the act or the character is judged. On the other hand, we confirmed that deciding for the equipment leads to higher evaluation of managerial skills.

The design of our study allows us to explore many possible hypotheses – we present only a few selected results: Faster decisions are judged as more moral only when there is no personal interest in play and saving the child is seen as preferable to buying the equipment when 5 lives are expected to be saved by the equipment in the future. However, when 50 or 500 lives are expected to be saved, saving the child is judged as less morally right. For more effects see the table below.



	Morality		Managerial skills	
	Estimate	*CI*	*Estimate*	*CI*
Intercept	4.86 ***	4.82 – 4.90	4.40 ***	4.36 – 4.44
Lives saved	-0.00	-0.05 – 0.05	-0.03	-0.07 – 0.02
Act evaluation	-0.35 ***	-0.42 – -0.27	0.02	-0.06 – 0.09
Decision equipment	0.23 ***	0.16 – 0.31	2.00 ***	1.93 – 2.08
Speed fast	-0.07	-0.15 – 0.01	0.06	-0.01 – 0.14
Motivation son	-0.16 ***	-0.24 – -0.08	0.03	-0.05 – 0.11
Lives x Act	0.01	-0.09 – 0.10	0.03	-0.07 – 0.12
Lives x Equipment	0.27 ***	0.18 – 0.37	0.17 ***	0.08 – 0.26
Act x Equipment	0.33 ***	0.17 – 0.49	-0.26 ***	-0.42 – -0.11
Lives x Fast	0.06	-0.04 – 0.15	0.07	-0.02 – 0.16
Act x Fast	0.05	-0.11 – 0.21	0.20 *	0.05 – 0.35
Equipment x Fast	-0.24 **	-0.40 – -0.08	0.20 *	0.05 – 0.35
Lives x Son	-0.08	-0.18 – 0.02	-0.01	-0.10 – 0.08
Act x Son	-0.10	-0.26 – 0.05	0.08	-0.07 – 0.23
Equipment x Son	0.38 ***	0.22 – 0.54	0.00	-0.15 – 0.15
Fast x Son	-0.21 **	-0.37 – -0.06	0.08	-0.07 – 0.23
Observations	5534		5534	
Notes			** p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001*	

REFERENCES

[1] Uhlmann, E. L., Zhu, L. L., & Tannenbaum, D. (2013). When it takes a bad person to do the right thing. *Cognition*, *126*, 326-334.

YOUR HYPOTHESES?

If you have an interesting hypothesis that could be tested with the present data, please write it below:
(note that we also have data for the results of the scholastic aptitude test which could be used in the analysis)

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