

Kohlberg's Dilemmas

How to Align the Internal-Structural *Definition* of Moral
Competence With its Measurement

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There is a voice inside of you
That whispers all day long,
'I feel that this is right for me,
I know that this is wrong.'
No teacher, preacher, partner, friend
Or wise man can decide
What's right for you – just listen to
The voice that speaks inside.

(The Voice, by Shel Silverstein)

Kohlberg's Definition of Moral Judgment Competence:

"the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on *internal* principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments."

Lawrence Kohlberg (1964, p. 425;
emphasis added)



Kohlberg's Unresolved Dilemmas:

- According to Kohlberg's theory, we must measure moral competence
 - ▶ in reference to the individual's *internal* moral orientations, not to external norms,
 - ▶ as reflected in the *pattern* of an individual's manifest behavior rather than in the content of his or her reasoning.
- However, when measuring moral competence, Kohlberg (and most of his disciples) rely on psychometric models (e.g., classical test theory, item response theory)
 - ▶ which use *external* standards for scoring, and
 - ▶ which are focused on *itemized* behavior, not relations.

Dilemma #1: Internal Theory but External Method

Internal Definition

“Morality ... defined as 'having moral principles' ... includes ... *inner conformity* to them in difficult situations rather than outer conformity in routine situations.” (Kohlberg 1958, p. 3; emphasis added)

“Proponents of behavioristic conceptions of moral conduct typically define conduct as moral if it conforms to a socially or culturally accepted norm. All of us recognize this is intuitively incorrect...” (Kohlberg 194, p. 392)

External Measurement

“Right action is ... defined by, and justified by philosophers.”

(Kohlberg 1984, p. 393)

“I include in my approach a normative component. [...]

I assumed the need ... to give a philosophic rationale for why a higher stage is a better stage.” (p. 400)

Dilemma #2: Structural Theory but Itemized Method

Structural Definition

“Cognitive structures are always *structures* (schemata) of action.” (Kohlberg 1958, p. 8)

“Our stages of moral judgment are defined by the *form* of moral judgment, not its content.” (Kohlberg 1984, p. 524)

“If a test is to yield stage *structure*, a concept of that structure must be built into the initial act of observation, test construction, and scoring.” (pp. 401-402)

Itemized Measurement

“The structures themselves can *never be observed*...” (Kohlberg 1984, p. 242)

“My colleague and I ... have required *each* item in the manual to clearly reflect the structure of the stage to which it is keyed.” (p. 403; emphasis added)

My Solution: Experimental Questionnaires

	Standard for Scoring	Behavioral Data
Classical Test Theory, Item Response Theory (e.g., MJI, DIT, SRM)	External	Itemized
Experimental Questionnaire Method (e.g., MCT)	Internal	Structural

See Lind, G., 1978, 1982, and 2008.

MCT: Theory-Driven Test-Construction

- The items (arguments) have been created using the moral orientations with which Kohlberg described his 'Stages'. The items have been validated through expert ratings.
 - ▶ No data-driven item selection was done to boost 'reliability' of test-items or correlation of the MCT with age
- Rigorous construct validation by theory-derived criteria:
 - ▶ Non-fakeability of the moral competence score (Kohlberg 1958; 1984)
 - ▶ Preference hierarchy of the six types of moral orientations (Rest 1969)
 - ▶ Quasi-simplex structure of inter-correlations of the six types (Kohlberg 1958)
 - ▶ Affective-cognitive parallelism (Piaget 1981; Kohlberg 1984)
- The MCT meets all four criteria very well, as studies in many countries show
- The MCT is in use since 1977, validated in 39 languages

Main Features of the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT)*

- **Competence Testing Requires a Difficult Task:** The MCT confronts the participants with the task to judge agreeing and *opposing* arguments by their *moral quality* rather than their opinion-agreement.
- **Structural Properties of Behavior:** Participants' *pattern* of ratings of 24 arguments for and against a given decision.
- **Structure Built into the Test:** The standard MCT consists of pro and contra arguments in two dilemma stories (workers, doctor), representing six moral orientations, thus forming a 2 x 2 x 6 orthogonal, experimental design.
- **Internal Criterion for High Moral Competence:** Moral competence is measured independently from participant's specific moral orientation.
- **Scoring the Two Aspects of Judgment Behavior:**
 - ▶ **Moral competence:** the C-score reflects the degree to which an individual's action pattern is determined by his/her moral orientations.
 - ▶ **Moral orientation:** The degree of preference for each of the six moral orientations.

* Formerly called "Moral Judgment Test" (MJT)

MCT Example: 2nd story

2. Doctor's Dilemma

A woman had cancer and she had no hope of being saved. She was in terrible pain and so weakened that a large dose of a painkiller such as morphine would have caused her death. During a temporary period of improvement, she begged the doctor to give her enough morphine to kill her. She said she could no longer endure the pain and would be dead in a few weeks anyway. The doctor complied with her wish.

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

20. Do you disagree or agree with the doctor's behavior?

-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

How acceptable do you find the following arguments *in favor* of the doctor? Suppose someone said he acted *rightly* . . .

**I strongly
reject**

**I strongly
accept**

Pro

21. because the doctor had to act according to his conscience. The woman's condition justified an exception to the moral obligation to preserve life. . . .

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

22. because the doctor was the only one who could fulfill the woman's wish; respect for her wish made him act as he did. . . .

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

23. because the doctor only did what the woman talked him into doing.
He need not worry about unpleasant consequences.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

24. because the woman would have died anyway and it didn't take much effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller. . . .

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

25. because the doctor didn't really break a law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

26. because most of his fellow doctors would presumably have done the same in a similar situation. . . .

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

Contra

























	effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
25.	because the doctor didn't really break a law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
26.	because most of his fellow doctors would presumably have done the same in a similar situation.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
<hr/>										
How acceptable do you find the following arguments <i>against</i> the doctor? Suppose someone said that he acted <i>wrongly</i> ...		I strongly reject					I strongly accept			
27.	because he acted contrary to his colleagues' convictions. If they are against mercy-killing the doctor shouldn't do it.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
28.	because one should be able to have complete faith in a doctor's devotion to preserving life even if someone with great pain would rather die.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
29.	because the protection of life is everyone's highest moral obligation. We have no clear moral criteria for distinguishing between mercy-killing and murder.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
30.	because the doctor could get himself into much trouble. They have already punished others for doing the same thing.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
31.	because he could have had it much easier if he had waited and not interfered with the woman's dying.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
32.	because the doctor broke the law. If one thinks that mercy-killing is illegal, then one should refuse such requests.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

Thank you!

Excerpt from the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT); Lind (2008). Contact: Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de

Structural Scoring

The moral competence score [C] describes the *individual pattern* of responses to a multivariate test situation.
Fictitious example: Patterns of low and high competence-scores

Person:	Person A		Person B	
Opinion:	“The decision was right”		“The decision was right”	
	Contra	Pro	Contra	Pro
Arguments on				
Stage 1	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 2	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	-4  -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 3	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4  -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	-4 -3  -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2  0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 5	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	-4 -3 -2 -1  +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0  +2 +3 +4
Stage 6	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1  +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3  +4
	C-score: 0.4 Low moral competence		C-score: 92.2 High moral competence	

See Lind, G. (1982; 2008), also: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>

Internal Standards

The moral competence score [C] is tied
to the participant's *own* orientations, not to *external* norms
Example: Same moral competence, but different modal orientations

Person:	Person C		Person B	
Opinion:	“The decision was right”		“The decision was right”	
	Contra	Pro	Contra	Pro
Arguments on				
Stage 1	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 ✖ +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 ✖	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 2	-4 -3 -2 -1 ✖ +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 ✖ +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 3	-4 -3 ✖ -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 ✖ 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 ✖ -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 ✖ 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 5	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 ✖ +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 ✖ +2 +3 +4
Stage 6	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 ✖ +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 ✖
	C-score: 92.2 High moral competence Modal moral orientation: Stage 1		C-score: 92.2 High moal competence Modal moral orientation: Stage 6	

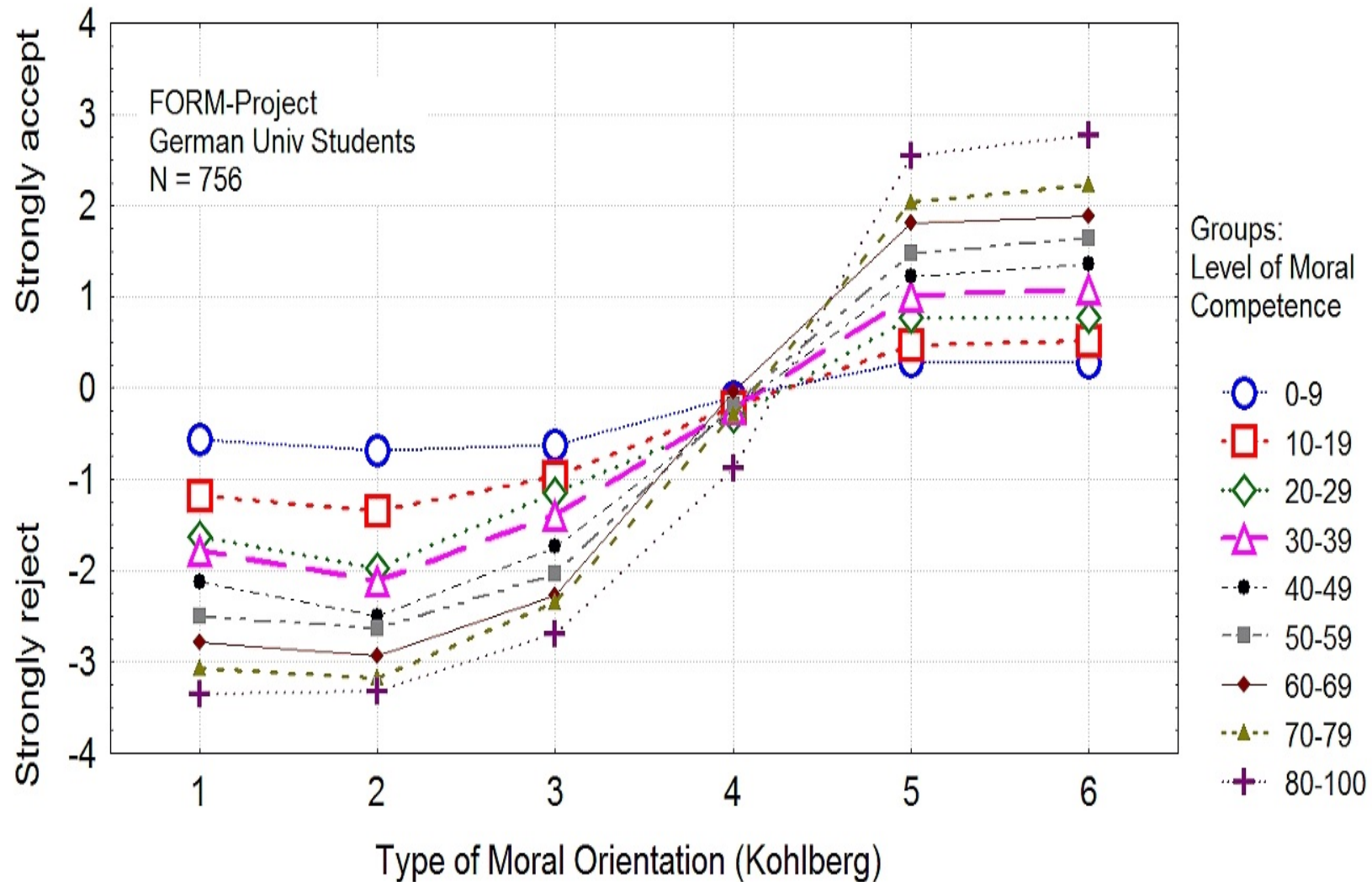
MCT-Research Supports and Extends Internal-Structural Theory of Moral Behavior and Development

- **Relevance:** Participants with high C-scores show
 - ▶ lower rates of criminal behavior
 - ▶ better school learning (grades in various fields)
 - ▶ political liberalism and reflectivity
 - ▶ less extreme opinions on moral issues
 - ▶ quicker decision-making in dilemma-situation and
 - ▶ less 'brain-effort' (activity in the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex)
- **Evaluation of education:** The development of moral competence is fostered
 - ▶ by opportunities for responsibility-taking
 - ▶ by dilemma-discussions, especially by the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma-Discussion* ($r > 0.50$)
 - ▶ and hampered by dogmatic religiosity of the students.

Cognitive-Affective Parallelism

- Although the measure of moral competence (cognitive aspect) is independent of the participant's specific moral orientation, there is an almost perfect *empirical* correlation between the two aspects (see next slide).
- This findings supports the parallelism-hypothesis by Jean Piaget which could hitherto not be tested because, before the MCT, there was no instrument which could measure both aspects simultaneously.
- The strong cognitive-affective parallelism explains why tests of moral orientation (e.g., DIT, SRM) often produce similar findings.
- However, under certain circumstances this empirical correlation can break down. For example, if something is at stake, the participants may fake their moral orientation upward, while they cannot fake their competence score.

Parallelism of Moral Orientation and Competence



Report card

With the Moral Competence Test (MCT)

“a scoring algorithm can be arrived at for assessing pure stage structure score for an individual.”

Lawrence Kohlberg, 2010. Foreword. In: Lind, G., Hartmann, H.A., & Wakenhut, R., eds. 2010. Moral judgment and social education. Edison, NJ: Transaction Publisher.

Conclusion

Kohlberg's Dilemmas Resolved:

Internal-structural measurement is possible and flourishing.

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- For more references see: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>