

# The Money or the Morals? When Moral Language Is More Effective for Selling Social Issues

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We examine the effectiveness of economic and moral language used by employees when selling social issues to management. In contrast to prior work finding that employees believe it is best to use economic language to influence management to address social issues, we draw on the issue selling, persuasion, and behavioral ethics literatures to demonstrate that moral language is actually most influential—especially when the language is framed to align with the organization's values and/or mission. The results from a combination of 3 field survey studies and 1 experimental vignette study provide support for this hypothesis. In addition, we find support for *obligation* (i.e., manager's anticipated guilt), rather than *inspiration* (i.e., manager's prosocial motivation), as a mediator of this interactive effect. We discuss implications for literatures on issue selling, persuasion, and behavioral ethics.

*Keywords:* issue selling, persuasion, influence, behavioral ethics

As powerful economic institutions, organizations are increasingly being called on to address issues that help advance social welfare, such as the environment, health care, and poverty (Golden-Biddle & Dutton, 2012; Jones et al., 2016; Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003). Organizations have the opportunity—some might even say the obligation (Donaldson, 1982; Hinings & Greenwood, 2002)—to supplement traditional roles once served by governments and address pressing social issues. At the same time, employees are increasingly viewing their workplaces as important venues to advocate for social issues they deem significant in their personal lives (Davis & White, 2015; Net Impact, 2014; Sonenshein, DeCelles, & Dutton, 2014). Organizational scholars have examined employees' attempts to influence their work organizations to embrace social issues that they care about primarily from an issue selling perspective. This literature (see Ashford, Ong, & Keeves, 2017 for review), and the voice literature

more broadly (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012), examines the processes by which employees raise issues in their organizations. Although issue selling was originally described as a means for middle managers to influence the strategic direction of the firm (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), scholars have expanded its focus to include raising social issues in organizations (Sonenshein, 2006, 2012, 2016; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). For example, studies have examined how individuals sell environmental (Bansal, 2003; Howard-Grenville & Hoffman, 2003), gender equity (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998), and social justice (Sonenshein, 2009) issues inside business organizations whose missions do not always explicitly endorse these issues.

Within the issue selling literature, scholars are increasingly turning their attention to understanding the host of tactics individuals use to influence top managers to allocate attention and resources to an issue. These include building coalitions, bundling an issue with other issues currently being sold and attending carefully to the appropriate timing for the issue selling (e.g., Ashford & Detert, 2015; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Piderit & Ashford, 2003). One tactic prominently featured in Dutton and Ashford's (1993) original formulation of issue selling is framing—using language to shape the meaning of an issue in ways that resonate with a target. They argued that issues have no inherent meaning but rather they are given meaning by the way they are framed and communicated to others.

Framing appears to be an especially important tactic for selling *social* issues. Social issues carry what Piderit and Ashford (2003) called “an extra burden,” making the way they are framed critical for their sale. Such issues face two critical challenges in work organizations: issue equivocality (the issue can be defined by competing meanings) and issue illegitimacy (the issue may be seen

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as falling outside a justifiable basis for firm action; Sonenshein, 2016). Both of these impediments suggest the importance of language as individuals try to define the meaning of an issue in ways that resonate with managers. Along these lines, scholars suggest that framing social issues as economic issues can increase issue selling effectiveness (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Sonenshein, 2006) because many business organizations endorse a shareholder primacy perspective that does not consider social issues to be in a firm's self-interest (Friedman, 1970; Sundaram & Inkpen, 2004). As a result, employees worry about the perceived legitimacy of social issues and use economic language as a way of ameliorating their concerns. Economic language also helps managers recognize the ways in which social issues are beneficial to a firm's bottom line, thereby mitigating legitimacy concerns (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001). In support of this perspective, practitioner-oriented articles prescribe the use of economic framing to sell issues by referencing attributes such as operational efficiency, capital acquisition and market demand (Howard-Grenville & Hoffman, 2003). Consider the remarks by William McComb, former CEO of the company that used to be known as Liz Claiborne.

In the first 3 weeks of my term as CEO, we lost an employee, who was murdered by her husband at a distribution center in rural Pennsylvania. There were, unfortunately, several cases of domestic violence during my tenure at Liz. . . . This is, in fact, also a *business issue*. The statistics reveal that the *number of lost workdays and uneven attendance in our companies* resulting from domestic violence is large enough to deserve the kind of attention usually given to illness . . . Acting in their own self-interest, corporations should ensure that their employees are at work, that they have a place to call or a resource to visit if they seek shelter . . . (McComb, 2014; emphasis added).

Although social issues inherently involve moral values, researchers find that not only do issue sellers utilize economic language, but they are also averse to using moral language, sometimes even concealing this moral language (Piderit & Ashford, 2003; Sonenshein, 2006). This practice dovetails with research suggesting that the use of moral language to raise some issues in organizations is detrimental to an employee's career (Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997). Organizations may collude in this "moral muteness" by systematically deterring individuals from framing issues in moral terms (Bird & Waters, 1989; Bird, Westley, & Waters, 1989; Jackall, 1988).

Although research has examined how individuals advocate for social issues, there is little research examining the relative effectiveness of various issue selling tactics. This omission is important because employees' lay theories about selling social issues may be wrong, and continuing to endorse them may create a self-fulfilling prophecy that further perpetuates economic viewpoints above other perspectives in organizations (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005). In reality, many organizations do not always adopt a singular focus on shareholder returns and increasingly adopt social missions alongside economic ones (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Besharov, 2014). If such is the case, then the assumption that economic language is always effective (and moral language is ineffective) in selling social issues becomes questionable.

In this article, we develop and test theory that examines when and how moral language can be an effective means to sell social

issues in four studies from a variety of organizations, using multi-source data. We also explore potential mechanisms to explain the findings. In doing so, we seek to challenge a bedrock assumption of scholars in the issue selling literature and the practitioners who have readily endorsed this view.

This research makes several contributions to the literatures on issue selling, persuasion, and behavioral ethics. First, this article shifts the focus from issue sellers' lay theories of the best tactics to use (e.g., issue framing; Sonenshein, 2006) to examining empirically the effectiveness of those tactics. Such a shift in focus has wide practical implications but also theoretical ones. Scholars have limited insights into how these oft-used tactics shape decisions and outcomes in organizations. Furthermore, it is important to understand the mechanism(s) through which these approaches operate. The present research provides an important understanding of when and why using moral (vs. economic) language may be an effective tactic to influence management when selling social issues.

Second, we extend theory and research on persuasion by taking a contextual rather than an individual-difference lens. Building on work that has shown messages are most persuasive when they match the goals, values, and attributes of target *individuals* (Lavine & Snyder, 1996), we argue that messages are most influential when they are framed to fit best within the broader *social context*. Instead of matching persuasive appeals to individual characteristics of the target, we test whether messages that are framed to fit the organizational environment (i.e., the organization's values and/or mission) are more effective. To be clear, we do not focus on whether the type of argument objectively fits the organization (e.g., using moral language in an ethical organization), but, rather whether the moral language is *framed* to fit with the organization's values and/or mission.

Third, we extend the behavioral ethics literature by examining the dominant assumption of much prior research that business is imbued more with an economic mindset than a moral lens (Kouchaki, Smith-Crowe, Brief, & Sousa, 2013; Molinsky, Grant, & Margolis, 2012; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999; Wang, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2011). Extending this work we propose that, if done correctly, a moral orientation can be more effective than an economic one when influencing key decision makers in a business context. Furthermore, because most employees care about social issues for moral reasons, this approach allows for a more authentic influence attempt.

## Theoretical Background

Individuals considering selling any issue in an organization are concerned about the supportiveness of the context (Ashford et al., 1998; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011), potential risks to their image or reputation (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003), and their chances of gaining attention for their issue successfully (Ashford et al., 1998; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Morrison, 2011, 2014; Morrison et al., 2011). These concerns are particularly acute for raising social issues inside most organizations (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998) given that such issues are often less consensually legitimate or strategic (Piderit & Ashford, 2003).

Individuals are thought to manage such concerns through choices they make in the process of selling an issue. These choices include whether to involve others, when to raise issues, whether to

use public or private channels, and how to frame the issue to increase their chances of success (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Sonenshein, 2016). Empirical work has found that sellers who build diverse coalitions, and do so early in the process, are more successful (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Dutton et al., 2001; Howard-Grenville, 2007). Success also depends on whether individuals appropriately time their efforts given other events in the context (Dutton et al., 1997; Dutton et al., 2001) or stages within a particular decision process (Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Although empirical work on choices regarding the use of public or private channels of communication to sell issues is scarce and issue specific (e.g., Piderit & Ashford, 2003), several studies have identified choices individuals face regarding how an issue is framed.

Building on work in the strategy area focused on top managers' interpretations of issues (e.g., as a threat or opportunity; Billings, Milburn, & Shaalman, 1980; Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Dutton & Jackson, 1987), Dutton and Ashford (1993) proposed that issue sellers face a myriad of choices regarding how to *frame* their issue. Additionally, Sonenshein (2006) showed that individuals act to maximize their selling success by explicitly crafting an issue through intentional choices about language.

One aspect of framing that has received considerable attention is whether to frame an issue using a business logic versus a moral appeal (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Dutton and Ashford proposed that when issues are framed as "strategic" and relevant to the organization's long-term financial performance, management can more easily understand the issue's importance and relevance to the organization, and thus are more likely to attend to and allocate more resources to the issue. Using a sample of hospital employees, Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, and Lawrence (2001) found that over 40% of issue sellers explicitly connected their issue to a valued organizational goal (i.e., profitability) and 75% used a business frame when presenting their issue. One interviewee expressed that his or her attempt to get the hospital to focus more on patient care was more successful when it was "couched" as making financial sense for the hospital. Similarly, Sonenshein (2006) found that issue sellers tended to use economic arguments despite sometimes holding private social or moral reasons for advocating an issue, suggesting that issue sellers recognize this framing need even if it means being less authentic. This conceptual and empirical work provides a consistent conclusion that issue sellers' choices reflect a belief that they will be most effective in influencing management when they utilize economic language to make a persuasive appeal.

### Framing Moral Arguments as Fitting With the Organization's Values and/or Mission

Despite the conventional wisdom that economic language will be more effective than moral language at getting attention for an issue, it may come at some cost. For example, a growing literature suggests that when individuals think about an ethical decision through an economic or business decision frame they tend to be less ethical, compassionate, and cooperative (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). Recent research finds that when individuals have an economic schema, defined as a knowledge structure that focuses on self-interest, rationality, and efficiency, they tend to show less compassion to others (Molinsky et al., 2012). Additional studies show that being exposed to economics classes increased the level

of self-interest and greed among undergraduate students (Wang et al., 2011) and that merely looking at money leads to less ethical behavior (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006, 2008) because it increases the likelihood that decision makers will operate using a business decision frame as opposed to a moral frame (Kouchaki et al., 2013).

These studies stand in contrast to research showing that thinking of an issue using a moral frame as compared to an economic or business frame leads to more cooperative and pro-social behavior. For example, Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) found that individuals were more cooperative when they viewed an organizational policy through a moral rather than a business frame. Similarly, participants were more cooperative when playing a behavioral economics game when it was referred to as a "community game" (which connoted being ethical) versus a "Wall Street Game" or a "Stock Market Game" (which connoted being focused on economic gain; Ellingsen, Johannesson, Mollerstrom, & Munkhammar, 2012; Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004). These findings suggest that using economic language when selling social issues may activate an economic schema which could result in the same managers being less likely to support the social issue because they are less focused on "doing good." In contrast, using moral language could activate a moral decision frame which could lead to more cooperative and prosocial behavior aimed at addressing the social issue.

To reconcile these conflicting suggestions, we propose that it is critical to consider how issue sellers frame social issues as having a strong fit with the organizational context. Specifically, social issues might be perceived as more consensually legitimate when an issue seller argues that the issue would fit well with the mission or values of an organization. Because most organizations espouse socially prescribed moral values, issue sellers can frame the argument as fitting with the organization's values and/or mission regardless of the actual values "in-use" in the organization. Although past research has examined organizational context as it shapes the decision to sell an issue, we focus on how issue sellers frame social issues to fit with contextual conditions to increase effectiveness. More specifically, we examine how the effectiveness of moral language used in selling a social issue is in part dependent on the extent to which the social issue is framed as fitting with contextual factors that shape the targets of that selling effort—the values and/or mission of one's organization. To make this argument we draw on the concept of message matching (Lavine & Snyder, 1996) or message-person congruence (Hirsh, Kang, & Bodenhausen, 2012) from the persuasion literature. The matching hypothesis suggests that messages are most persuasive when they are aligned with the characteristics of the individual being influenced such as his or her personality traits (Hirsh et al., 2012; Lavine & Snyder, 1996), temporal orientation (Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009), and motivations (Clary et al., 1998).

The issue selling literature echoes this matching logic by suggesting that framing that fits with the organizational context will be most effective. Because different people have different knowledge bases, values, and interests, it takes empathy to figure out what other people in the organization care about and what kind of appeal would most move them to take action (Ashford & Detert, 2015). Issue sellers need to possess the flexibility to frame a message in different ways to appeal to different audiences. For example, while an issue seller may care most about gender equity



from a social justice standpoint, he or she may want to focus on talent diversity when talking to people in the human resources department, or creative diversity when talking to people in the design department. Similarly, if organizational leaders have a finance background, issue sellers may be more successful if they frame their issues as “cost relevant” or “potential profit generators” rather than in moral terms (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Ashford and Detert (2015) and Howard-Grenville (2007) found that successful issue sellers reported greater tailoring of their message to particular audiences. In addition to framing their issue according to different targets’ interests and concerns, successful issue sellers also frame their issue according to organizational values and priorities (Ashford & Detert, 2015; Bansal, 2003; Sonenshein, 2006).

As such, we extend work from psychology on message matching by proposing that messages are not only more effective when they are framed to match the characteristics of a given *person* but also that they are more influential when they are framed to match important attributes of a particular organizational *context*. Such attributes provide clues, for example, about when moral language would be most influential. Sellers who are able to appeal to consensually affirmed cultural values in their selling efforts increase the chances of selling success with a moral appeal—even if the organization’s enacted values are weaker than their espoused values. As such, when an issue is framed as aligning with an organization’s values and mission, using moral language should be more effective than when it is not.

*Hypothesis 1:* The relationship between the use of moral language and issue selling effectiveness will be moderated by framing the issue to fit with the company’s values and/or mission. Specifically, the use of moral language is more effective when the issue is framed as having a high fit with the company’s values and/or mission, while controlling for use of economic language.

### Theoretical Mechanisms Underlying the Interactive Effect

Theory and research on prosocial behavior provide useful clues to uncover the underlying mechanisms for the hypothesized interactive effect (see Schroeder & Graziano, 2015 for a review). This literature highlights two relevant antecedents to “doing good:” prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt. The first may emerge from the target’s felt *inspiration* to support the issue being raised and the latter due to his or her felt *obligation* to do the same. We propose that both of these mechanisms can help explain why using moral language and framing a social issue as fitting with the organization’s values and/or mission is effective in garnering support from management when selling social issues at work.

**Prosocial motivation.** Prosocial motivation is defined as the desire to expend effort based on a concern for helping or contributing to others. It is typically prompted by contact with others who need help (Batson, 1987; Grant, 2007). Such behaviors include voluntary helping (Grant, 2007), organizational citizenship behavior (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Rioux & Penner, 2001), and cooperative negotiation behavior (Beersma & De Dreu, 1999, 2002).

Attraction, selection, and attrition processes (Schneider, 1987) suggest that managers endorse (at least somewhat) the predomi-

nant values of the organization. Thus, managers in organizations espousing social values will be motivated to behave in ways that are consistent with what the organization reports standing for. Thus, when an employee uses moral language to sell a social issue and describes the issue as having a high fit with the organization’s values and/or mission, the target will be prosocially motivated to do good for the organization and adhere to moral prescriptions. The target is likely to feel a sense of *inspiration* or awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003) by hearing a moral appeal, particularly in a domain often imbued with economic language. However, the target is only prosocially motivated to help the organization and address the social issue when it is portrayed as being in line with the organization’s values and/or mission, rendering it both a moral issue and a strategic issue, thereby adding to its legitimacy. In essence, when a moral appeal connects to something more central to the organization such as its values and/or mission, it provides the needed justification for managers to be prosocially motivated to dedicate time, attention, and resources to the social issue. In contrast, the use of moral language without highlighting how the issue fits with the values and/or mission of the organization is likely to engender a sense that the issue is less relevant, or consensually strategic, and thus the target is less apt to have a prosocial orientation to address the social issue.

*Hypothesis 2a:* The interactive effect predicted in Hypothesis 1 will be mediated by the prosocial motivation of the issue selling target.

**Anticipated guilt.** The second potential mechanism suggested by the prosocial behavior literature is anticipated guilt (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Fiske, 2002; Lindsey, 2005). Guilt is characterized as a moral emotion that is linked to negative evaluations of one’s own behaviors (Tangney, 1996; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). It captures a negative feeling about the adverse impact of one’s actions on others. Anticipated guilt describes individuals’ concerns about feeling guilty in the *future* (Baumeister et al., 2007; Fiske, 2002). Anticipating that behaving a certain way (or not engaging in certain behaviors) might make an individual feel guilty, creating a motive to change their behavior to avoid guilt. Thus, anticipated guilt leads people to behave in socially desirable ways. For example, anticipated guilt has been found to have a positive impact on socially desirable outcomes such as making bone marrow donations (Lindsey, 2005).

We propose that when an employee uses moral language to sell a social issue and frames that issue as having a high fit with the organization’s values and/or mission, the leader will anticipate feeling guilty if s/he does not adhere to the employee’s request. In other words, once an issue has been moralized either through the use of moral language and/or the connection of the social issue to organizational values (Rozin, 1999; Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999), it calls up values and principles generally considered to be ethical or “good.” When those values are also endorsed by the organization, leaders may feel an obligation to address the issue because if they do not, it suggests they are not living up to socially and organizationally prescribed moral standards, thereby threatening their moral sense of self (Monin & Jordan, 2009). This threat is especially likely when the moral language fits with the organization’s values and/or mission because there are fewer excuses to not devote resources to the issue.

In contrast, the use of moral language that is not explicitly connected to the organization's values and/or mission may not lead to the same level of anticipated guilt because the issue is less likely to be seen as central to the organization's interests and objectives.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The interactive effect predicted in Hypothesis 1 will be mediated by the anticipated guilt of the issue selling target.

### Overview of Studies

We conducted three studies (Studies 1a, 1b, and 1c) to test Hypothesis 1 and then in Study 2, we tested our entire theoretical model.<sup>1</sup> Each study has unique goals and was designed to address the limitations of the other studies. The goal of Study 1a was to explore the associations between our key variables in a sample of working adults in a broad cross-section of organizations. We surveyed employees from a variety of different organizations about whether their use of moral language was associated with self-report ratings of issue selling effectiveness and whether the extent to which they argued that the issue fit with the company's values moderated this relationship. The goal of Study 1b was to examine if the findings from the general working sample in Study 1a replicate in a more specific sample, as well as to reduce common method bias. We surveyed a unique sample of "professional" issue sellers and their respective managers provided ratings on their issue selling effectiveness. The goal of Study 1c was to establish the causal relationships between language and issue selling effectiveness. Thus, Study 1c was an experimental vignette study where participants assumed the role of a manager and assessed the issue selling effectiveness of a hypothetical employee. We sought to address the limitations of each successive study and as a set they provide a robust test of Hypothesis 1.

In Study 2, we tested the complete theoretical model by surveying employees about the arguments they use when selling a specific issue, and their managers about how effective they were at selling issues. Further, we examined the two proposed mechanisms for the hypothesized interaction—the prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt of the manager. In sum, we sought to replicate the proposed effect in four studies spanning the lab and different field contexts.

### Study 1a

#### Method

**Participants.** We utilized a snowball sampling method (Grant & Mayer, 2009; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) to recruit participants. This method allows us to ask more sensitive questions because a third party (our research team) administered the survey rather than the human resource department of the respondents' work organizations. This enables respondents to be more honest in their responding because they do not have to worry about being penalized by their organization for their answers—something important in research involving ethical issues. This sampling method also allows us to access participants across a variety of organizations and industries thus increasing generalizability. We invited 141 undergraduate students attending a large university in the United States to participate in this study by asking each student to recruit a

working adult who was willing to fill out an online survey about his or her work experiences. A link to the online survey was sent to the working adults at the e-mail address students provided. Students were asked to encourage the working adult to complete the survey and received course credit for their involvement as an incentive. As recommended by Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, and Gelléri (2017), we implemented several practices to ensure that we had actual working employees filling out the surveys and to minimize the incentives for students to fabricate the data. For example, students were asked for the full name and e-mail address of the working adults they recruited. Furthermore, students received credit simply for recruiting people—credit was in no way contingent on the responses that participants provided, and students who could not find working adults to complete the survey were given alternative assignments for obtaining their research credit. A recent study found that student-recruited samples were not substantively different from other types of samples (Hochwarter, 2014; Wheeler, Shanine, Leon, & Whitman, 2014) and provide a more heterogeneous sample (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

At the start of the online survey, the working adult participants were asked to think about a time when they spoke up to their supervisor about an important "social issue" to try to create a positive change that they thought would benefit others and/or society. Participants were asked "Have you ever done this before?" Approximately half (66 out of 141; 46.8%) of the participants indicated that they had sold such issues before. Of the 66 participants, four participants did not respond to questions in the survey beyond this point, leaving a sample of 62 participants.

The participants were 43.5% male and had a mean age of 49.23 years ( $SD = 10.48$ ). Participants were White/Caucasian (86.2%), followed by Asian (10.3%) and other ethnicities (3.4%). They worked in their present organization for a mean of 3.42 years ( $SD = 1.87$ ) and in a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, construction, information technology, education, and health care. The majority of participants (89.7%) were full-time working adults and the others worked part-time.

Participants who indicated that they had sold a social issue before were further asked in an open-ended question "What was the social issue?" These issues are displayed in Table 1.

**Measures.** Although the topic of issue selling language (moral or economic) has been discussed in the literature, there are no established measures to assess these constructs. Thus, we developed survey items based on existing theory and research on issue selling that has focused on moral and economic language in selling issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Sonenshein, 2006), framing issues according to organizational values (Ashford & Detert, 2015; Bansal, 2003; Sonenshein, 2016), and issue selling effectiveness (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Participants responded to all survey items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Use of moral language when selling issues was measured by asking participants if they "argued that it would be the socially good thing to do" and "argued that it is the morally right thing to do" ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Use of economic language when selling issues was measured by asking if

<sup>1</sup> The studies reported in this article have been approved by the University of Michigan's Institutional Review Board ("Issue Selling: The Effectiveness of Moral and Economic Language;" HUM00116102).

Table 1  
Frequency of Types of Social Issues

Type	Study 1a		Study 1b		Study 2	
	Examples	Number of participants	Examples	Number of participants <sup>a</sup>	Examples	Number of participants <sup>a</sup>
Health issue	n.a.	0 (0%)	General health, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria	22 (85%)	Breast cancer awareness, healthcare	2 (1%)
Employee issue	Employee treatment, employee rights, human resource practices (e.g., training, hiring, pay)	14 (23%)	Employee wellness	1 (4%)	Employee rights, employee welfare, employee treatment, human resource practices (e.g., pay, benefits)	84 (33%)
Diversity issue	Women's rights, discrimination	2 (3%)	Gender equity	1 (4%)	Gender equity, racial and religious discrimination	23 (9%)
Community issue	Charity events, charity donations, community service (towards specific causes such as homelessness, education, famine and disaster relief)	10 (16%)	n.a.	0 (0%)	Charity events, charity donations, community service (towards specific causes such as homelessness, eldercare, rescue animals, medical research)	76 (29%)
Ethical issue	Personal integrity in business dealings	1 (2%)	n.a.	0 (0%)	n.a.	0 (0%)
Environmental issue	Waste recycling, energy conservation	4 (6%)	n.a.	0 (0%)	Waste recycling, reducing waste, environment	40 (16%)
Other issues	Politics	8 (13%)	Human rights, transparency	2 (8%)	Politics, immigration policies, minimum wage policies	33 (13%)
Not specified	—	23	—	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup> This column does not sum to 100% because of rounding. *N* = 62, 26, and 258 in Studies 1a, 1b, and 2, respectively.

they “made a business case” and “made an economic argument” ( $\alpha = .70$ ). Fit was measured using one item: “I argued that the change would fit well with the values of the organization.” Finally, the participants were asked if they “managed to generate support from (their) supervisor for the initiative” and “managed to increase the attention (their) supervisor gave to the issue” ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for Study 1a are displayed in Table 2.

Table 3 presents a summary of the linear regression results. Following Aiken and West (1991), we began by mean-centering the independent variables (moral language, economic language)

and the moderator variable (fit). Next, we multiplied the mean-centered variables for moral language and fit to create an interaction term. The results of the regression analyses with issue selling effectiveness as the dependent variable indicated no significant main effects of moral language,  $b = .23, SE = .12, t = 1.90, p = .06$ , and economic language,  $b = .08, SE = .11, t = .72, p = .48$ . However, there was a statistically significant interaction between moral language and fit,  $b = .11, SE = .06, t = 2.04, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .05$ . The interaction is displayed graphically in Figure 1. Simple slopes analyses revealed that when fit was high (1 SD above the mean), there was a significant positive relationship

Table 2  
Study 1a Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Moral language	5.39	1.30	(.73)			
2. Economic language	4.81	1.37	.05	(.70)		
3. Fit	5.33	1.43	.24	.15	—	
4. Issue selling effectiveness	5.27	1.32	.31*	.15	.40*	(.88)

Note. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal in parentheses. *N* = 62.  
\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 3  
Regression Results for Study 1a

Regression model	DV: Issue selling effectiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2
(Constant)	5.28 (.15)**	5.23 (.15)**
Moral language	.23 (.12) <sup>†</sup>	.31 (.13)*
Economic language	.08 (.12)	.13 (.12)
Fit	.31 (.12)**	.33 (.11)**
Moral language × Fit		.11 (.06)*
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.22**	.27**
$\Delta R^2$	.22**	.05*

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

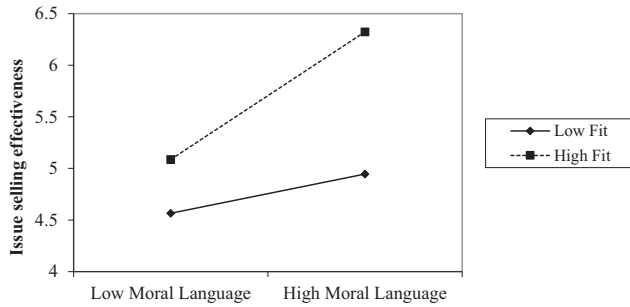


Figure 1. Interaction of moral language and fit on issue selling effectiveness (Study 1a).

between moral language and issue selling effectiveness,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, when fit was low (1  $SD$  below the mean), the relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness was not significant,  $t = 1.13$ ,  $p = .26$ .

Although theory suggests that fit should moderate the relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness, we also thought it would be informative to examine two other relationships using supplementary analyses. First, we ran a model replacing the interaction term between moral language and fit with the interaction term between economic language and fit. The economic language and fit interaction term was not significant,  $b = .09$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 1.23$ ,  $p = .22$ . Second, we ran a model replacing the moral language and fit interaction with a moral language and economic language interaction term. The moral language and economic language interaction was also not significant,  $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = .28$ ,  $p = .78$ .

## Discussion

In Study 1a, we found support for Hypothesis 1. There was a significant interaction between moral language and fit, such that the use of moral language was more effective when an argument emphasizing fit with the organization's values was also used. Because we measured issue selling effectiveness with self-reported ratings, our results may be biased. For instance, due to perceptual biases, participants might perceive that they sold an issue successfully even when their manager did not actually support the issue. Also, it is possible that participants' evaluations of the effectiveness of their issue selling attempt influenced how they reported about the tactics they used (e.g., participants might infer from their issue selling success that they must have argued that the issue fit the mission/values of the organization). We address the issue of self-reported data by adopting a multisource survey design in Study 1b and Study 2, and an experimental vignette design in Study 1c.

### Study 1b

For Study 1b, we gained access to an international nonprofit organization, World Business Alliance (WBA), which works with hundreds of business organizations, including Fortune 500 companies, and is committed to investing their resources to improve global health. Employees appointed as liaisons between their companies and WBA and their managers served as the sample for this

study. Although each of their companies had agreed to be part of the alliance, significant selling of the global health issues covered by the alliance was needed to gain ongoing organizational attention and resources for these issues. Employees were asked to reflect on their issue selling experience and the arguments they used, and their managers were asked to rate the effectiveness of their employee's issue selling.

## Method

**Participants.** We recruited 88 employee-manager dyads to participate in this study. All focal employees were senior-level employees who were professionally trained by WBA to sell social issues related to global health in their respective workplaces and all had issue selling experience. Focal employees completed their surveys and we then used their names and issue descriptions to personalize the survey that we distributed to their managers. This procedure allowed managers to know exactly which employee and issue they were supposed to be thinking about as they gave effectiveness ratings.

Response rates were 57.95% (51 out of 88) for focal employees and 29.55% (26 out of 88) for managers, resulting in a sample of 26 employee-manager dyads from a variety of organizations. Focal employees were 75.0% male, 80.0% White/Caucasian and had a mean age of 48.7 years ( $SD = 7.95$ ). They had an average organizational tenure of 7.70 ( $SD = 5.91$ ) years and were on average, 3.65 ( $SD = 1.37$ ) levels away from the CEO or president of their organization. Focal employees worked in a variety of countries across North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia-Pacific. On average, they belonged to large organizations with an average size of 44,198 employees in each organization. We did not collect demographic information from managers in this sample due to constraints from WBA to keep the manager survey as short as possible. The types of issues covered in this study are displayed in Table 1.

**Measures.** All measures used in this study were codeveloped with representatives at WBA. All measures used a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) unless otherwise noted. Focal employees rated their use of moral language in selling the issue they described by responding to two items ( $\alpha = .94$ ): "I used values to help sell the issue," and "I sold the issue by appealing to what's right." They rated their use of economic language in selling the issue they described by responding to this item: "I made a business case to sell the issue." Then, they were asked "To what degree does the issue fit with the organization's mission?" (1 = *to a small degree*, 7 = *to a great degree*). Using the description of the issue provided by focal employees, managers were asked to rate the effectiveness of the focal employees' issue selling of the specific issue with four items ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Managers were asked "How effective has (your employee) been at getting attention to the issue?" (1 = *very ineffective*, 7 = *very effective*); "Overall, to what extent do you feel (your employee) has been effective at getting resources for the issue within the organization?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *entirely*); "How much more (or less) money would you estimate the organization has given to the issue as a result of (your employee's) efforts?" (1 = *much less*, 7 = *much more*); and "How much more (or less) time would you estimate the organization has given to the issue as



a result of (your employee's) efforts?" (1 = much less, 7 = much more).

## Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for Study 1b are displayed in Table 4.

Table 5 presents a summary of the linear regression results. The results of the regression analyses with manager-rated issue selling effectiveness as the dependent variable indicated that the main effects of moral language,  $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = -1.15$ ,  $p = .27$ , and economic language,  $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $t = .17$ ,  $p = .87$ , were both not significant. However, there was a statistically significant interaction effect between moral language and fit,  $b = .19$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t = 2.37$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .23$  (see Figure 2). Further analyses indicated that when fit was high (1 SD above the mean), the relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness was positive but nonsignificant,  $t = .91$ ,  $p = .37$ . However, when fit was low (1 SD below the mean), the relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness was significantly negative,  $t = -2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Consistent with the supplemental analyses in Study 1a, we also ran a model examining the interaction between economic language and fit. The economic language and fit interaction term was not significant,  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = .26$ ,  $p = .41$ . We next ran a model examining the interaction of moral language and economic language. The moral language and economic language interaction was also not significant,  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = 1.26$ ,  $p = .22$ .

## Discussion

The interaction we found in Study 1a between moral language and fit was replicated in Study 1b, suggesting that employees' use of moral language was more effective when it fit with the organization's mission. When employees used moral language that fit with the organization's mission, supervisors were more likely to devote attention, time, money, and other resources to the social issue. Interestingly, the interaction pattern differed slightly from Study 1a such that when an issue seller used moral language but did not argue it fit with the company's mission, moral language had a negative relationship with issue selling effectiveness. This difference could be attributed to the uniqueness of this sample—the issues being sold largely relate to global health (e.g., HIV/AIDS, malaria), which have less direct relevance to typical business organizations. Using moral language, without drawing explicit links to the organization's values, might backfire because

Table 5  
Regression Results for Study 1b

Regression model	DV: Issue selling effectiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2
(Constant)	5.77 (.18)**	5.56 (.19)**
Moral language	-.18 (.15)	-.03 (.15)
Economic language	.03 (.19)	-.04 (.17)
Fit	.05 (.19)	.25 (.19)
Moral language $\times$ Fit		.19 (.08)*
$R^2$	.10	.34
$\Delta R^2$	.10	.23*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

it highlights the irrelevance of the issue to the organization's core agenda.

This study involved a sample of professionals explicitly charged with selling issues and the managers to whom they report. Such a sample is rare in the issue selling literature. Nevertheless, the conclusions we can draw from this study are limited by the small sample size, which was a function of the complexity involved in matching responses between employees and their managers, and our choice to limit this sample to experienced issue sellers associated with WBA. Despite the small sample, we found a significant interaction effect, with a large effect size, suggesting that the pattern is robust. To address the small sample size and issues of causality, we decided to conduct Study 1c, which is an experimental study where participants are presented with vignettes about a hypothetical issue seller.

## Study 1c

For Study 1c, we conducted an experimental vignette study, which allowed us to build a causal argument for the effectiveness of moral language and fit on issue selling effectiveness. Participants were working adults recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). They were presented with vignettes about a hypothetical employee who approached them with an idea for their company. The vignette included quotes from the employee to demonstrate the arguments that the employee used to sell the issue. Participants assumed the role of a manager and rated the effectiveness of the persuasive appeal.

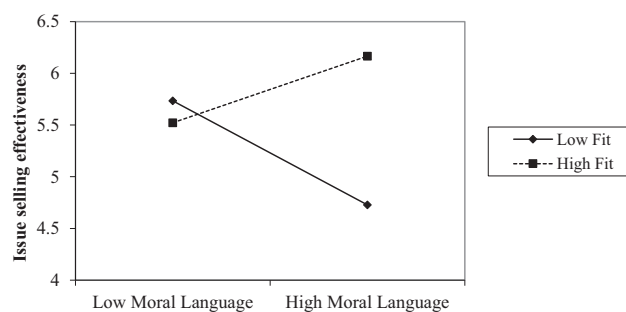


Figure 2. Interaction of moral language and fit on issue selling effectiveness (Study 1b).

Table 4  
Study 1b Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Moral language	5.33	1.64	(.94)			
2. Economic language	5.88	1.37	.27	—		
3. Fit	5.63	1.21	.64**	.37	—	
4. Issue selling effectiveness	5.80	.77	-.32	-.14	-.16	(.73)

Note. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal in parentheses.  $N = 26$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .



## Method

**Participants.** We recruited 170 working adults from MTurk to participate in this study. Data collected through MTurk is of comparable quality to data collected through more traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). To account for careless responding, we excluded data from one participant who completed the study considerably more quickly than the other participants.<sup>2</sup> Our final sample consisted of 169 individuals (45.6% female) who had a mean age of 34.85 years ( $SD = 8.71$ ).

**Procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four vignettes: (Language: Moral Language vs. Economic Language)  $\times$  (Fit: Fit vs. No Fit). All vignettes started with asking the participant to imagine that they are a supervisor at a manufacturing organization and one of their employees comes to them with an idea to incorporate a “green” technology in the manufacturing process. The vignettes included “quotes” from the hypothetical employee to demonstrate the kind of arguments the employee used. The condition for economic language included the following quote: “Ensuring that we use environmentally friendly technology is simply the economic thing to do. It makes business sense to use the new green technology since it would be profitable.” The condition for moral language included the following quote: “Ensuring that we do what is best for the natural environment is simply the ethical thing to do. It is our moral responsibility to protect the environment for the livelihood of our future generations.” The fit conditions included an additional sentence from the employee describing how using the new green technology would be in line with the organization’s values and mission: “Furthermore, using this new green technology is in line with the values of our organization. The change would fit well with the mission of our organization.”

Then, participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of the employee’s issue selling using six items. The six items ( $\alpha = .93$ ) include the two issue selling effectiveness items from Study 1a, and four additional items for a more robust measure: “I find the employee’s arguments persuasive,” “I think the employee’s ideas are good,” “I will support the employee in moving their idea forward,” and “I will spend more time investigating the employee’s idea.”

We also included three manipulation check items. At the end of the study, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following items: “The employee argued that using this technology will save the company a lot of money,” “The employee argued that using this technology is simply the morally right thing to do,” and “The employee’s argument fits with the company’s values and mission.” Participants in the economic language conditions ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) were more likely than those in the moral language conditions ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) to indicate that the employee argued that the idea will save a lot of money,  $F(1, 167) = 75.73$ ,  $p < .01$ . Participants in the moral language conditions ( $M = 6.25$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) were more likely than those in the economic language conditions ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) to indicate that the employee argued that the idea is the morally right thing to do,  $F(1, 167) = 18.22$ ,  $p < .01$ . Finally, participants in the fit conditions ( $M = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) were more likely than those in the no fit conditions ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ) to indicate

that the employee’s argument fits with the company’s values and mission,  $F(1, 167) = 82.30$ ,  $p < .01$ .

## Results

A univariate analysis of variance yielded a significant main effect of language, such that the employee’s argument in the economic language condition was rated as more effective than the moral language condition,  $F(1, 164) = 10.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .51$ . There was also a significant interaction between language (moral language vs. economic language) and fit (fit vs. no fit) on issue selling effectiveness,  $F(3, 164) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$  (see Figure 3). Among participants in the economic language condition, there was no significant effect of fit on issue selling effectiveness ( $M_{fit} = 5.76$ ,  $SD_{fit} = .95$ ,  $M_{nofit} = 5.56$ ,  $SD_{nofit} = .96$ ),  $F(1, 164) = .84$ ,  $p = .36$ ,  $d = .20$ . However, among participants in the moral language condition, there was a significant positive effect of fit on issue selling effectiveness ( $M_{fit} = 5.57$ ,  $SD_{fit} = .93$ ,  $M_{nofit} = 4.74$ ,  $SD_{nofit} = 1.20$ ),  $F(1, 164) = .14.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .60$ . Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

## Discussion

Using a different methodology (experimental vignettes), we replicated the interaction effect between moral language and fit found in the prior two field survey studies—participants rated a hypothetical employee’s use of moral language as more effective when the employee also described how the new initiative would be in line with the organization’s mission and values. However, it is noteworthy that unlike earlier studies, we found that the use of economic language was perceived as more effective than the use of moral language. This interesting finding may be attributable to the difference in study design. Because this study asked participants to read and respond to a hypothetical scenario, rather than recall an actual work experience, they could be making their decisions based on their (perhaps uninformed) lay theories about how managers *should* make decisions (i.e., managers should make decisions based on economic reasoning). This makes sense in light of prior scholarly work showing the dominance of an economic logic in business organizations. Furthermore, in this study, framing moral language as fitting with the company’s values and mission simply reduced the negative effect of using moral language (as in Study 1b), rather than improved the positive effect of using moral language (as in Study 1a). These findings are important because they suggest that issue sellers who want to be authentic in their appeals (i.e., talking about the moral reason for why the issue should be addressed) are able to do so without negatively impacting their ability to effectively influence their supervisor provided they couch it in terms of the company’s values and mission.

While the experimental method used in Study 1c is helpful in that it allows us to build a causal argument, it is limited because participants responded to the vignettes according to their lay theories about how issues should be framed. Therefore, it is possible that this study tells us more about how people think they

<sup>2</sup> The one participant was excluded because s/he spent less than 1/10th of the average time ( $Mean = 13.75$  m) to complete the study (criteria used by Bauman, Tost, & Ong, 2016). Including this participant in our analyses did not change the direction or significance of our results.

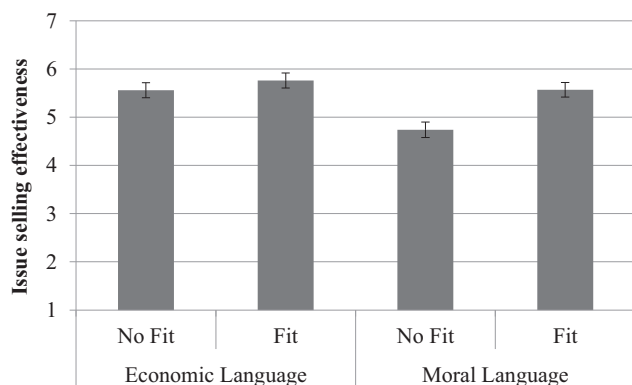


Figure 3. Interaction of moral language and fit on issue selling effectiveness (Study 1c).

are supposed to respond, rather than how they actually respond. For our next study, Study 2, we return to the field study design used in the previous studies, which allows us to get a better grasp of how actual managers have made their decisions to endorse the issues that employees sell to them. Also, in Study 2, we test the full theoretical model including the two proposed mediators as well as conduct a validation study for our measures.

## Study 2

In Study 2, employees reported their experience selling one specific issue and their managers rated their respective employees' issue selling effectiveness with respect to that same issue. Study 2 also examined potential mediating mechanisms underlying the relationships between the interaction of moral language and values fit on issue selling effectiveness—prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt. Because the sample in this study was not limited to professional issue sellers affiliated with a specific set of organizations (as in Study 1b), we were able to obtain a larger sample size. In addition, Study 2 addressed one potential limitation of the prior field surveys: that the organizations may have differed on their actual level of ethicality so that our findings related to fit were less about framing and more about a match between the message and the values “in use” in the organizations. To address this potential concern, we assessed and controlled for the ethicality of the organization (e.g., corporate social responsibility, ethical climate, ethical leadership).

## Method

**Participants.** We partnered with a survey panel company called ROI Rocket to recruit managers working across the United States. This company is a leading provider of high-quality research services in commercial industries as well as academic fields. To be eligible for our study, the manager had to remember a time when one of his or her employees spoke up to him/her about a social issue. We asked managers to recall and write about the specific issue and answer questions about their response to their employee's issue selling attempt. At the end of the manager survey, managers were asked to provide the e-mail address of the employee who was the issue seller. We then used each manager's issue description to individually personalize a survey that we

distributed to their employee. Employees first confirmed that they had spoken up about the specific issue their manager wrote about and then answered questions about the type of arguments they used to sell the issue. Although the methodology is labor intensive, this procedure ensured that the employee and their manager focused on the same issue as they completed their survey.

The survey panel company recruited 305 managers who were eligible for our study. Of the 305 employees that were e-mailed to complete the employee survey, 285 (93.44%) responded to the e-mail and completed the employee survey. Twenty-seven dyads were removed from our analyses because the manager either did not provide a description of an issue (i.e., there would be no issue upon which the employee could respond to questions about) or wrote a nonsensical answer. This process yielded a final sample of 258 complete employee–manager dyads.

Focal employees were 53.1% male and had a mean age of 35.86 years ( $SD = 9.57$ ). On average, they had worked for their current organization for 7.50 years ( $SD = 5.34$ ). Managers were 53.5% male and had a mean age of 40.14 years ( $SD = 9.44$ ). On average, they had worked for their current organization for 11.09 years ( $SD = 6.78$ ) and had supervised the focal employee for 5.62 years ( $SD = 4.18$ ). The types of issues covered in this study are displayed in Table 1.

**Measures.** All measures used a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Moral language.** Focal employees were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following three items as they applied to their issue selling generally ( $\alpha = .86$ ): “*I argued that it would be the morally good thing to do*,” “*I argued that it would be the morally right thing to do*,” and “*I argued based on principle*.”

**Economic language.** To measure employees' use of economic language, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with three items about their issue selling generally ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The first two items were the same ones used in Study 1a. We also included an additional item: “*I argued that it would be profitable*.”

**Fit.** To measure fit, we included the individual items used in Studies 1a and 1b. Employees responded to two items ( $\alpha = .88$ ): “*I argued that the change would fit well with the values of the organization*” and “*I argued that the change would fit well with the mission of the organization*.”

**Issue selling effectiveness.** Supervisors rated the effectiveness of employees' issue selling on six items ( $\alpha = .92$ ). We used the same items that appeared in Study 1c.

**Mediator: Prosocial motivation.** Two items assessed supervisors' prosocial motivation as a result of employees' issue selling ( $\alpha = .82$ ). These were: “*I felt like it was an opportunity to do something good in line with the organizational mission*” and “*I wanted to help the organization and do the morally right thing*.”<sup>3</sup>

**Mediator: Anticipated guilt.** Two items also assessed supervisors' anticipated guilt as a result of arguments their employee used for issue selling ( $\alpha = .79$ ). These were: “*I would have felt*

<sup>3</sup> We created the two prosocial motivation items to assess prosocial motivation in the specific context of issue selling. Our aim was to have items with a high degree of face validity. A general prosocial motivation measure (e.g., Grant, 2008) would not be suitable in this context since we are specifically interested in targets' desire to help their organization and do good, rather than targets' general desire to help.

guilty if I didn't do anything about the issue(s)" and "I would have been embarrassed if I hadn't acted on the issue(s)."<sup>4</sup>

**Control variables.** We controlled for employee and supervisor sex, and employee and supervisor organizational tenure, because previous work indicates that these variables could have an effect on supervisor evaluations of employees and the effectiveness of employee voice (Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012). In addition, we included employee-rated measures of corporate social responsibility (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, & Skarlicki, 2013;  $\alpha = .81$ ), ethical climate (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010;  $\alpha = .94$ ), and ethical leadership (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005;  $\alpha = .94$ ). By controlling for these variables, we explore if the effects of moral language and fit generalize across all types of organizations, not just socially oriented organizations, organizations with a more ethical climate, or those led by more ethical leaders, which may be already more amenable to such issues.

**Measurement validation.** Given that there are no existing measures of our key constructs, we developed survey items based on existing issue selling theory and research (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Sonenshein, 2006). To address validity issues, we conducted a validation study in which we compared our scales for issue selling tactics with alternative measures of these constructs. We recruited 200 working adults from MTurk to validate our measures. We included several attention checks in the survey to screen out careless responding. Ten participants failed our attention checks and were excluded from our analysis. The online survey that participants were asked to fill out contained our measures of moral language, economic language, and fit, as well as issue selling tactics measures from Piderit and Ashford (2003). Specifically, we included Piderit and Ashford's (2003) measures for tactics such as involving others, using a private setting, rationality, and ingratiation. We included these seven measures in the survey for two reasons. First, we wanted to meaningfully distinguish between our measures of moral language, economic language, and fit. Second, we wanted to meaningfully distinguish our measures from established measures in the issue selling literature.

We first performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the dimensionality of the three factors representing moral language, economic language, and fit. Results from the CFA of four different models are displayed in the Appendix. Chi-square difference tests revealed that the three-factor model provides a good fit (CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .02) and had the best fit to the data compared to all other models (i.e., two-factor and one-factor models). Next, we performed a CFA to examine the dimensionality of the seven factors representing moral language, economic language, fit, involving others, private setting, rationality, and ingratiation. Again, results from the CFA of four different models are displayed in the Appendix. Chi-square difference tests revealed that the seven-factor model provides a good fit (CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .05) and had the best fit to the data compared to all other models (i.e., five-factor, two-factor, and one-factor models). These results suggest that there are meaningful differences between our measures of moral language, economic language, and fit, as well as meaningful differences between our measures and established issue selling tactics measures.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for this study are displayed in Table 6.

Table 7 presents a summary of the linear regression results. After controlling for the three ethical context variables (e.g., CSR, ethical climate, ethical leadership), the results of the regression analyses with manager-rated issue selling effectiveness as the dependent variable indicated no significant effect of moral language,  $b = .09$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = 1.53$ ,  $p = .13$ , and no significant effect of economic language,  $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = -1.63$ ,  $p = .11$ . As predicted, there was a statistically significant interaction effect between moral language and fit,  $b = .08$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t = 2.51$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$  (see Table 7, Model 2, and Figure 4). Simple slopes analyses indicated that when fit was high (1 *SD* above the mean), there was a significant positive relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness,  $t = 3.06$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, when fit was low (1 *SD* below the mean), the relationship between moral language and issue selling effectiveness was negative and nonsignificant,  $t = .26$ ,  $p = .79$ .

Next, for supplemental analyses, we ran a model examining the interaction between economic language and fit. The economic language and fit interaction term was significant,  $b = .09$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = 3.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ . Simple slopes analyses indicated that when fit was low (1 *SD* below the mean), the relationship between economic language and issue selling effectiveness was significantly negative,  $t = -3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, when fit was high (1 *SD* above the mean), the relationship between economic language and issue selling effectiveness was not significant,  $t = .66$ ,  $p = .51$ . This finding suggests the interaction between economic language and fit is driven by the negative effects of using economic language (in contrast to prior work suggesting the effectiveness of using economic framing), and that using an argument about fit might help buffer the negative effects of using an economic argument. We also ran a model testing the interaction between moral language and economic language. The moral language and economic language interaction was not significant,  $b = .05$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t = 1.64$ ,  $p = .10$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ .

Using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro, we tested for mediation using a series of linear regressions. With prosocial motivation as the dependent variable, the results in Table 7, Model 4 show that the interaction between moral language and fit on prosocial motivation was not significant,  $b = -.04$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t = -1.26$ ,  $p = .21$ ,  $\Delta R^2 < .01$ . However, Model 6 shows that the interaction between moral language and fit on anticipated guilt was significant,  $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = 2.37$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$  (see Figure 5). Simple slopes analysis demonstrated that when fit was high (1 *SD* above the mean), the relationship between moral language and anticipated guilt was positive and significant,  $t = 3.70$ ,  $p < .01$ . When fit was low (1 *SD* below the mean), the relationship was not significant at the .05 level,  $t = 1.90$ ,  $p = .06$ . Next, we entered

<sup>4</sup> The two guilt items were a subset of items from an establish guilt scale (Bagozzi, Wong, & Yi, 1999). In moral psychology, guilt and embarrassment have typically been grouped together under the heading of self-conscious moral emotions (Haidt, 2003; Tangney et al., 2007). Both are emotions felt in the aftermath of transgressions. Indeed, in the Bagozzi et al. (1999) scale that we took the items from, guilt and embarrassment were both classified in the same category of "guilt."



Table 6  
Study 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Moral language	5.68	1.18	(.86)												
2. Economic language	4.67	1.62	.20**	(.87)											
3. Fit	5.56	1.34	.45**	.34**	(.88)										
4. Issue selling effectiveness	5.58	1.12	.28**	.04	.37**	(.92)									
5. Employee sex	.42	.50	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.12	—								
6. Supervisor sex	.47	.50	-.01	.01	.02	.01	.27**	—							
7. Employee tenure	7.50	5.34	.00	.09	.01	.01	.08	.02	—						
8. Supervisor tenure	11.09	6.78	-.04	-.07	-.07	.07	.02	-.12*	.52**	—					
9. Prosocial motivation	5.60	1.20	.35**	.10	.45**	.71**	-.11	-.03	.00	-.05	(.82)				
10. Anticipated guilt	4.67	1.64	.27**	.19**	.21**	.48**	-.12	.01	.06	-.05	.52**	(.79)			
11. Corporate social responsibility	5.48	.98	.27**	.25**	.51**	.39**	-.03	-.08	-.01	.03	.40**	.17**	(.81)		
12. Ethical climate	5.27	1.37	.14*	-.03	.20**	.23**	.05	.10	.09	.06	.24**	.14*	.32**	(.94)	
13. Ethical leadership	5.91	.90	.35**	.10	.46**	.43**	-.05	-.00	.13	.15*	.38**	.09	.53**	.38**	(.94)

Note. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal in parentheses.  $N = 258$ . For employee sex and supervisor sex, *female* = 1, *male* = 0.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

both prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt as predictors into a regression model with issue selling effectiveness as our dependent variable (Model 7). In Model 7, we found positive significant effects of both prosocial motivation,  $b = .51, SE = .05, t = 9.74, p < .00$ ; and anticipated guilt,  $b = .12, SE = .04, t = 3.56, p < .00$ , on issue selling effectiveness.

Further analyses with 5,000 bootstrap samples revealed that the conditional indirect effect of moral language on issue selling effectiveness through anticipated guilt was positive and significant when fit was high,  $effect = .05, SE = .03, 95\% CI [.01, .12]$ , but not significant when fit was low,  $effect = .02, SE = .02, 95\% CI [-.01, .07]$ . However, the conditional indirect effect of moral language through prosocial motivation was neither significant when fit was high,  $effect = .10, SE = .06, 95\% CI [-.01, .24]$  nor when fit was low,  $effect = .11, SE = .07, 95\% CI [-.03, .24]$ . These results suggest that managers' anticipated guilt, but not their prosocial motivation, mediated the relationship between the moral language and fit interaction and issue selling effectiveness.

Finally, to check the robustness of our results, we also modeled our data using path analysis in structural equation modeling soft-

ware (MPlus). We ran two models. The first model included direct paths from the independent variables to the mediator variables, and from the mediator variables to the dependent variable (full mediation). The second model included direct paths from the independent variables to the mediator variables, and from the independent variables and mediator variables to the dependent variables (partial mediation). When conducting these path analyses, the interaction between moral language and fit was significantly linked to anticipated guilt ( $b = .11, SE = .05, t = 2.11, p = .04$ ), but not prosocial motivation ( $b = -.00, SE = .03, t = -.10, p = .92$ ). Further, anticipated guilt was positively related to issue selling effectiveness in the full mediation model ( $b = .12, SE = .03, t = 3.69, p < .00$ ) and the partial mediation model ( $b = .13, SE = .03, t = 3.72, p < .00$ ). The fit statistics produced suggest the data demonstrate a good fit with both the full mediation model ( $CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .02, chi-square ratio = 2.51$ ) and the partial mediation model ( $CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .01, chi-square ratio = 1.44$ ). A chi-square difference test suggests that the partial mediation model has a significantly better fit than the full mediation model,  $p = .01$ .

Table 7  
Regression Results for Study 2

Regression model	Model 1 DV: Issue selling effectiveness	Model 2 DV: Issue selling effectiveness	Model 3 DV: Prosocial Motivation	Model 4 DV: Prosocial Motivation	Model 5 DV: Anticipated Guilt	Model 6 DV: Anticipated Guilt	Model 7 DV: Issue selling effectiveness
(Constant)	5.59 (.06)**	5.54 (.07)**	5.60 (.06)**	5.63 (.06)**	4.65 (.09)**	4.56 (.10)**	5.55 (.05)**
Moral language	.09 (.06)	.13 (.06)*	.05 (.06)	.04 (.06)	.20 (.09)*	.24 (.09)**	.00 (.05)
Economic language	-.07 (.04)	-.06 (.04)	-.08 (.04)†	-.09 (.04)*	.14 (.06)*	.15 (.06)*	-.05 (.03)
Fit	.14 (.06)*	.14 (.06)*	.20 (.06)**	.19 (.06)**	-.08 (.09)	-.08 (.09)	.02 (.05)
Employee sex	-.23 (.14)†	-.26 (.13)†	-.04 (.13)	-.03 (.13)	-.33 (.20)†	-.37 (.19)†	-.08 (.10)
Supervisor sex	.02 (.14)	-.03 (.14)	-.10 (.13)	-.08 (.13)	.10 (.20)	.04 (.19)	.01 (.10)
Employee tenure	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	-.02 (.01)
Supervisor tenure	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.01)*
Corporate social responsibility	.20 (.09)*	.19 (.09)*	.18 (.08)*	.19 (.08)*	-.03 (.12)	-.05 (.12)	.06 (.06)
Ethical climate	.04 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.09 (.07)	.10 (.07)	-.01 (.04)
Ethical leadership	.24 (.09)**	.25 (.09)**	.19 (.09)*	.19 (.09)*	-.32 (.13)*	-.31 (.13)*	.22 (.07)**
Prosocial motivation					.73 (.09)**	.73 (.09)**	.51 (.05)**
Anticipated guilt			.32 (.04)**	.32 (.04)**			.12 (.04)**
Moral language × Fit		.08 (.03)*		-.04 (.03)		.11 (.05)*	.07 (.02)**
R <sup>2</sup>	.268**	.288**	.453**	.457**	.335**	.352**	.613**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.268**	.020*	.453**	.004	.335**	.017*	.613**

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



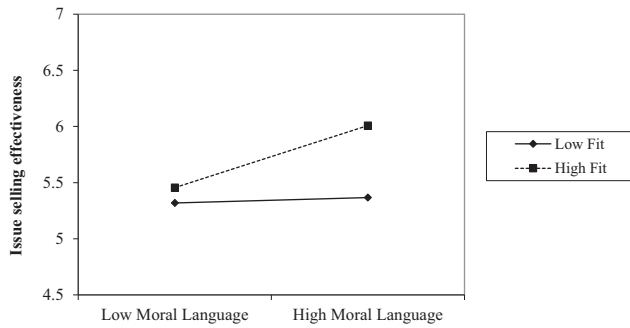


Figure 4. Interaction of moral language and fit on issue selling effectiveness (Study 2).

## Discussion

In Study 2, we found a significant interaction between moral language and fit, such that the use of moral language was more effective when the issue was framed as having a high fit with the organization's values and mission. In addition, the relationship between issue selling effectiveness and the interaction of moral language and fit was mediated by managers' anticipated guilt (Hypothesis 2b), but not their prosocial motivation (Hypothesis 2a). This pattern suggests that when employees use moral language to sell a specific issue and emphasize the issue's fit with their organization's values and mission, they are able to generate feelings of anticipated guilt in their supervisors, which drives their support for the issue.

### General Discussion

In this research, we moved beyond the assumption that economic language always trumps moral language by developing and testing theory about when and why moral language is effective for selling social issues at work. In contrast to prior research and conventional wisdom suggesting that it is best to use economic language when selling social issues at work (Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton et al., 2001; Sonenshein, 2006), we found that economic language is ineffective and that moral language can be effective when the issue also is framed as fitting the company's values and/or mission. We sought to explain this effect by theorizing two mediators (prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt). We found empirical support for anticipated guilt as a mediator, but not prosocial motivation.

### Theoretical Implications

This research has several theoretical implications for the literatures on issue selling, persuasion, and behavioral ethics. Issue selling research focuses on individuals' proactive behaviors as an important means of shaping a firm's priorities and subsequent allocation of resources (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) and in so doing, complements perspectives examining external pressures (Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007) or the role of top managers (Freeman, 1984, 2010; Phillips, 2003). To date, the vast majority of research on issue selling has focused on tactics individuals use when selling issues, without examining whether those tactics are actually effective (cf. Ashford & Detert, 2015). Extant research often assumes

lay theories that economic language will be effective and moral language will often be ineffective in raising issues (Dutton et al., 2001; Sonenshein, 2006). Yet, as research in organizational behavior suggests (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Heslin, VandeWalle, & Latham, 2006), individuals' lay theories about work are often inaccurate. There is limited theorizing and empirical research to examine the efficacy of various theories about tactic choices.

In the current research, we examined individuals' lay theories by theorizing and examining the effectiveness of specific issue selling tactics rather than examining the frequency of tactic use or individuals' lay theories about their effectiveness. We focused on the use of moral language because scholars have often dismissed this type of language as ineffective for raising concerns at work (Bird, 1996; Bird & Waters, 1989; Bird et al., 1989) and because people, despite their public claims, often times have moral reasons for advancing social issues (e.g., Sonenshein, 2006). By theorizing the importance of framing the issue as matching the organizational context (even if that language calls up values that are more espoused rather than "in use" in the current context), we were able to show that using moral language can be an effective tactic under certain conditions. This finding is particularly important in light of the dominance of economic discourse in organizations and the often typical silencing of moral arguments (Bird, 1996). As some have pointed out (Ferraro et al., 2005), scholars' theories—particularly economics-based ones—can end up creating self-fulfilling prophecies that reproduce these theories in work organizations as individuals fear engaging in behaviors not aligned with them. However, social issues in particular are often ambiguous, allowing issue sellers latitude in constructing their meaning (Sonenshein, 2016). Given this latitude, the theories that scholars use to explain issue selling success and ultimately to make prescriptions to practitioners have important consequences. By finding that moral language can be an effective tactic for selling social issues, we not only provide a fairer evaluation of this approach but also may interrupt the dominance of economic-based theories and their influence on organizations and potential issue sellers/targets within them regarding critical social issues.

Second, our research elaborates on the ways in which individuals evaluate the organizational context in their issue selling attempts. More specifically, we find that individuals also devise ways to weave the context into their issue selling strategies. Our findings suggest a potential for strong agency on the part of issue sellers who are able to frame their arguments to fit the context,

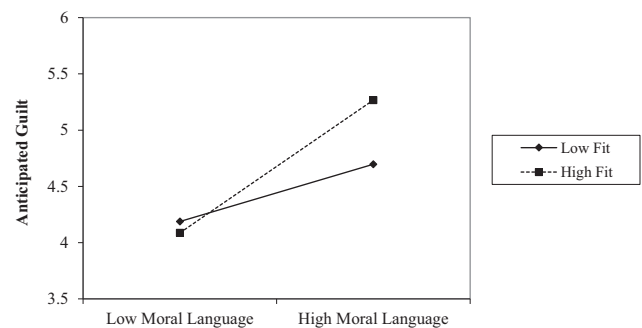


Figure 5. Interaction of moral language and fit on anticipated guilt (Study 2).

versus abandon the issue in the face of hostility, helping reinforce the importance that contextual knowledge is a key resource in issue selling (Dutton et al., 2002).

Third, our findings begin to unpack *why* moral language can be effective when selling social issues. More specifically, we theorized and tested two potential mediators from the prosocial behavior literature: prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt, and found support for anticipated guilt. As such, our theorizing and findings take an important step in explaining why moral language is sometimes effective in organizations largely thought to dismiss such claims. It appears to make issue selling targets feel a sense of anticipatory guilt, which drives them to support the initiatives of issue sellers. One potential explanation for why we found support for the mediating role of anticipated guilt but not prosocial motivation is that emotions have a stronger effect on behavior in response to specific events. In line with affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which highlights the implications of emotions induced by specific events for behavior at work, it may be that our focus on discrete issue selling events in Study 2 raised the salience and importance of emotion—namely, a manager's anticipated guilt.

Our studies have theoretical implications for the persuasion literature in explaining when and why persuasive attempts are most influential. Most research on this topic focuses on influence techniques (Cialdini, 1998; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) and has shown that messages are most persuasive when they match characteristics of the persuasion targets such as their personality, value, or goals (Lavine & Snyder, 1996). In this research we extend prior work on message matching by not focusing on the message's fit with *individuals* but instead examining its fit with the broader *social context*. Building on work suggesting the importance of attentiveness to the values of an organization (Bansal, 2003; Howard-Grenville & Hoffman, 2003), we found that moral messages that are framed to align with the organizational environment (i.e., the organization's values and/or mission) are more effective. Given that dyadic persuasion attempts are embedded in broader organizational contexts, our findings shed important new light on how to craft persuasive messages. In addition to a persuasive appeal matching the characteristics of the target of that appeal, we argue that it should invoke the broader organizational context in which the actors are embedded. One implication of this finding is that instead of framing issue selling in economic language, individuals can achieve a more authentic voice by using moral language provided it is framed as fitting with the organization's values and/or mission. And, given that essentially all organizations at least purport valuing certain socially prescribed moral virtues, issue sellers can make these types of fit arguments regardless of the "in use" values of the organization (as evidenced by the fact that our findings hold when controlling for the ethicality of the organization).

Finally, a sizable and growing body of work in behavioral ethics suggests that employees may not consider business as a moral domain of life. For example, research has demonstrated that when individuals are in a business-oriented frame of mind (as opposed to a moral frame) they tend to be less caring and prosocial (Kouchaki et al., 2013; Molinsky et al., 2012; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). Consistent with this work, we find that using economic language, although it represents a dominant logic in most for-profit businesses, is less likely to evoke support for the social issues raised by

employees. In contrast, moral language, which we found can encourage leaders' anticipated guilt, is more likely to elicit support such as investing time and resources to address a social issue when it is framed to fit with the broader organizational context. Thus, these studies build on this emerging area by highlighting that using a moral approach, as opposed to a business case or economic language, may be more likely to elicit a manager's anticipated guilt and an effort to address a social issue.

## Practical Implications

Our findings offer some encouragement for employees interested in selling social issues. Although previous work has prescribed that individuals should conceal the moral content of issues they care about (Sonenshein, 2006), such an approach may create psychological discomfort as individuals privately believe one thing but publicly state another. Our research suggests that it may not be maximally effective either. By finding that moral language can be an effective tactic for selling a social issue, we suggest the possibility of authentic expression is possible, provided the issue seller in fact cares about the issue for moral reasons. This result, along with prior findings that individuals often feel the need to conceal moral arguments, suggests that individuals may misread the hostility of the contexts they work in as it pertains to social issues. By better reading the organizational context to discern whether the organization collectively endorses values related to social issues and framing their selling attempt accordingly, individuals can express their concerns about key social issues using the moral language that underlies their interest in the social issue at hand.

In addition, organizations that want to foster an issue selling friendly environment might want to highlight their organizational values more strongly. When the organization's mission and values are more salient to employees, it makes it easier for employees to consider how they might use moral arguments to sell their issue of interest. Organizations can better communicate their mission and values by encouraging leaders to talk publicly about them or by creating physical artifacts (e.g., websites, posters) that portray them. Likewise, potential issue sellers should also seek out information about their organizations' mission and values proactively so that they can craft more persuasive arguments when selling social issues—of course, with the knowledge that essentially all organizations have socially prescribed underlying core values.

## Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The present research has a number of strengths. First, we examined issue selling effectiveness, versus how or when people sell issues. Second, we utilized a moderated-mediation model to explain how the framing of the issue is related to issue selling effectiveness, exploring potential mechanisms such as prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt derived from the pro-social behavior literature. Third, using different operationalizations of key constructs, we constructively replicated our findings across four diverse samples, two of which include multisource data. Our sampling strategy across the various studies also allowed us to generalize our findings across both professional issue sellers and regular employees.

Despite these strengths, the present research has some limitations. First, the sample size in several of our field survey studies—

particularly of our high-level professional issue sellers in Study 1b—was small. This limitation reflects the low incidence of professional issue sellers as well as their (and their bosses') high level in their organizations, which makes their compliance with voluntary surveys difficult. Fortunately, the other studies with larger samples yielded similar findings.

Second, given that there is little prior empirical work looking at the use of language and issue selling effectiveness, we were limited in our ability to draw on established measures of our key constructs. This led us to develop items based on existing theoretical work in the issue selling literature. Despite the absence of established measures, our items are face valid and reflect how these constructs are described in the literature. In addition, we have confidence in the robustness of the findings as we constructively replicated the results in different studies using slightly different measures of the key constructs. Furthermore, a confirmatory factor analysis on the measures in Study 2 supported our proposed constructs. We were unable to conduct a CFA for Studies 1a and 1b because for standard CFA models with two or more factors, each factor must have at least two indicators for identification (Kenny, 2011). Fortunately, the CFA results in Study 2, which incorporated the most comprehensive measures and had the largest sample provide support for the distinctiveness of the constructs.

Third, although we included an experimental vignette study to establish causal claims, we discovered that there were limitations to such a study design. When asked to respond to a hypothetical scenario, participants were likely influenced by the lay theories they hold about how managers are supposed to respond to issue selling efforts. It is through a field survey design that we are able to get data about how managers actually respond to their employees' issue selling efforts. A survey study design that separates measurement of the independent variables and the dependent variables temporally in order to build a causal argument, while still getting managers' survey responses about how they actually supported employees' issue selling attempts, would be a valuable next step in this research stream.

Fourth, in Study 1b, we asked participants to evaluate if the sold the issue by appealing "what's right." This item is ambiguous in that what is "right" could also be taken to mean maximizing profits, especially in an environment focused on making money. Fortunately, in Study 1a and Study 2, our item was more specific and participants were asked if they argued that the issue was "morally right."

We also suggest several avenues for future research. First, our findings can be further explored from an identity lens (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Brickson, 2005; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Glynn, 2000). The identity lens is relevant to our research because any collective value or perception, such as an identity, that both the seller and target embrace, to some extent, should cause the framing around fit to make a difference. The identity literature describes how the organization's identity shapes individuals' actions and reactions. As such, making the organization's identity salient in an issue selling attempt should help shape the targets' reaction to that attempt in identity-consistent ways. If the organization has a collective identity of being a certain kind of company, framing an issue selling appeal to fit that collective identity should be more effective than failing to do so.

Second, although we found support for anticipated guilt as a mechanism driving issue selling effectiveness, there are several

other alternative mechanisms that should be considered in future research. For example, fear (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009) is potentially relevant as a mediator. If an employee sells a social issue using moral language and argues that it fits with the company's values and/or mission, then a manager may fear retribution if s/he does not support the initiative. In addition, self-consistency dynamics (Festinger, 1957) might play a mediating role. If an employee sells a social issue using moral language and argues that it fits with the company's values and/or mission, then a manager may feel anticipated feelings of unresolved dissonance if s/he did not act on the issue. In other words, managers' support for the issue might be driven by a desire for consistency or reduced dissonance.

It is also possible that what to date has appeared to be a contest between moral and economic framing may in fact be masking an underlying distinction between immanent or instrumental framing. Perhaps we only found the predicted Moral Language  $\times$  Fit interaction because framing the moral argument as fitting with the company's values and/or mission provides an instrumental reason for the manager to care about the issue. In this sense, it might be useful to distinguish between immanent moral language and instrumental moral language. Immanent moral language would argue that acting on the issue is simply the ethical thing to do or is simply our moral responsibility (doing the moral thing as an end in itself). Instrumental moral language, on the other hand, would argue that acting on the issue is the ethical or morally right thing to do *because* it will advance the organization's commitment to integrity or it will enable the organization to uphold its goal of moral responsibility (doing the moral thing for some instrumental organizational end). We suspect that instrumental moral language will be more effective than immanent moral language in eliciting issue support from managers.

Lastly, many managers may prioritize personal concerns over organizational concerns. Not all managers identify with the organizations to which they belong (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and some may fit poorly with their organization (Kristof, 1996). In some cases, a manager's personal pursuits may even clash with the organization's interests. Thus, gearing an argument toward fit with the organization's mission or values may be in direct contrast to a manager's personal interests, and thus be less effective. More future work could be done to disentangle a manager's goals, interests, or values, from those of the organization. For instance, is it more effective for issue sellers to pitch their arguments toward the organization's mission and values, or toward the issue selling target's personal goals and interests? Also, perhaps the argument that addressing a social issue fits an organization's mission and values is only effective, or more effective, when the target has a high level of identification or fit with the organization.

## Conclusion

Employees often care about social issues, and use their work organizations as a vehicle to foster social change. Yet, despite conventional wisdom to frame that advocacy using economic language, speaking up about the moral dimensions of social issues can be effective when issue sellers make a clear connection between their issue and the organization's mission and values. Our findings suggest that this approach works because it elicits feelings of anticipated guilt



in issue selling targets, motivating them to devote resources and to take concrete actions to promote issues that benefit society.

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## Appendix

### Confirmatory Factor Analyses in Study 2

Variables	$\chi^2$ , $df$	Ratio $\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2$ , $\Delta df$ (model of comparison)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Our measures (M, E, F)						
1-factor model (M + E + F)	401.97, 20**	20.10	—	.340	.075	.321
2-factor model (M + E; F)	301.41, 19**	15.86	100.56, 1** (1-factor model)	.513	.283	.283
2-factor model (M + F; E)	129.91, 19**	6.84	272.06, 1** (1-factor model)	.808	.717	.178
3-factor model (M; E; F)	18.69, 17	1.10	111.22, 2**	.997	.995	.023
Our measures and Piderit and Ashford's (2003) measures (M, E, F, I, P, R, G)						
1-factor model (M + E + F + I + P + R + G)	1051.31, 196**	5.36	—	.525	.440	.156
2-factor model (M + E + F; I + P + R + G)	910.07, 195**	4.67	141.24, 1**	.603	.530	.143
5-factor model (M + E + F; I; P; R; G)	505.52, 190**	2.66	404.55, 5**	.825	.787	.096
7-factor model (M; E; F; I; P; R; G)	249.48, 181*	1.38	256.04, 9**	.962	.951	.046

*Note.* M = moral argument; E = economic argument; F = fit; I = involving others; P = private setting; R = rationality; G = ingratiation. E, M, and F are items used in our studies. I, P, R, and G are items from Piderit and Ashford (2003). A large chi-square value indicates that the model does not adequately fit the data, and a chi-square ratio (i.e.,  $\chi^2/df$ ) of three or less is taken as a useful guideline for accepting a model (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). A cutoff value close to .95 for CFI (comparative fit index) and TLI (Tucker-Lewis fit index), and a value less than .05 for RMSEA (root-mean-square error of approximation) indicates good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

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