

**Moral dilemmas of human resource professionals at the Dutch  
Ministry of Defence**

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### **Abstract:**

Nowadays, moral dilemmas are present in a great variety of different jobs and situations in life. A group that especially runs the risk to deal with moral dilemmas in organizational settings are human resource professionals. However, a high amount of research with regard to moral dilemmas uses theoretical moral dilemmas and there is little to no research done so far about the specific moral dilemmas that human resource professionals experience. Therefore, the recent research focuses on exploring and categorizing the content and the context of moral dilemmas that human resource professionals experience. In order to do so, three raters analysed narrative transcripts of moral decision making trainings of approximately 513 human resource professionals of the Dutch Ministry of Defence with the help of a coding scheme. In particular, it was researched which different topics of moral dilemmas were reported, if the dilemmas were rather impersonal or personal in nature and which deontological and teleological arguments were used to support the different action alternatives within the moral dilemmas. The degree of personal involvement and the division into teleological and deontological arguments were taken into account because these factors might have a serious impact on the decision making process.

Basically, seven different types of moral dilemmas were identified: Entitlement to get advice; Insights/knowledge about sensitive data; Contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values; Scope of responsibility; Hierarchical pressure; Organizational interest vs. individual interest; and Impartiality. 57.3% of the 231 analysed cases of moral dilemmas were rated as rather impersonal and 42.7% of the cases as rather personal. Also, a variety of different contradicting official guidelines (deontological arguments) concerning human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence were identified, as well as contradicting possible consequences (teleological arguments) of the moral decisions made by the human resource professionals.

*Keywords:* moral dilemmas, human resource professionals, impersonal-personal, deontological, teleological

### **Introduction:**

Morally right or not? - The issue about moral rightness is almost as old as mankind and is controversially discussed now as ever. Recent topics such as receiving refugees and the use of military drones provoke controversy about moral rightness every time anew. However, morality is also a hot topic in everyday life. Nowadays meritocracy and the development of the so called *Network Society* (Van Dijk, 2012) has led to increased complexity in human life. One has to make more and faster decisions in modern days and one is also increasingly connected in society. While complexity offers on the one hand great opportunities, it entails on the other hand new and greater challenges. One of the most crucial resulting challenges these days' concerns most of us and deals with the problem of ethical dilemmas.

At this juncture, a large proportion of research about ethical dilemmas is based on theoretical and hypothetical scenarios (Cornelissen, Bashshur, Rode & Le Menestrel, 2013; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley & Cohen, 2001; Lincoln & Holmes, 2010; Malinowski & Berger, 1996; Petrinovich & O'Neill, 1996; Verweij, Hofhuis & Soeters, 2007; Weber, 1990). However, ethical dilemmas are real-world issues and thousands of people have to deal with them day-to-day. One of the most relevant groups that runs the risk of dealing with ethical dilemmas in organizational settings are human resource professionals (Schumann, 2001). One of the reasons that particularly human resource professionals have to face moral dilemmas might be the fact that human resource professionals decide about sensitive issues such as employee recruitment. Schumann (2001) quotes a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (1998) that found that 54% of the participated human resource professionals already experienced misconduct, abuse or violation of the law and/or the ethical standards of the corresponding organizations. As such, the current study focuses on exploring

and identifying the content and the context (i.e. degree of personal involvement) of moral dilemmas that human resource professionals face as well as their moral decision making process (what kind of arguments are used).

Conflicts might arise due to the fact that human resource professionals are obliged to adhere to the organizational interests, individual interests but also to ethical norms – which is sometimes incompatible and therefore leads to moral dilemmas (Divisie Personeel & Organisatie Defensie, 2014). The unique function of human resource professionals as well as the special relation of organizational interests, interests of executives and ethical norms holds a lot of potential conflicts which can be illustrated with the help of an example drawn from the recent research described in this paper:

*An executive wanted me to manipulate the employee recruitment process in favour of the executive (to add a certain applicant – a well-known employee of the executive - after the application deadline). This is against the official guidelines for human resource professionals as I have to ensure equal treatment and transparency during the application process. In other words, to add the applicant after the deadline would be unfair towards the other applicants that applied on time. In addition, unlike the other applicants, the applicant of the executive did not meet the application criteria of the advertised position (he lacked on certain skills). However, I knew that not granting the wishes of the commander would displease him about my functioning as his HR advisor. Should I grant his wishes or should I act in accordance to the official guidelines?*

In the portrayed example, the interests of the executive conflicts with the official guidelines for human resource professionals as they have to ensure fairness/equality and transparency during the application process (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). On the other hand, the human resource professional runs the risk of worsen the relationship with the executive. In fact, this might become especially relevant if the human resource professional will work in

another function in the department of the corresponding executive later on. As such, there is no option but hurting the official guideline or insubordination with regard to the “order”/interests of the executive.

It is of crucial importance to analyse the underlying moral dilemmas of human resource professionals, since moral dilemmas might lead to great interpersonal problems but also intrapersonal problems such as stress, feelings of guilt, shame and compunction (Maguen & Litz, 2012). A group of human resource professionals that exceedingly runs the risk of dealing with these problems are employed at the Dutch Ministry of Defence (Divisie Personeel & Organisatie Defensie, 2014). One reason for this is the fact that the military context of the Ministry of Defence increases the probability of *moral injury* - a term that refers to a severe inner conflict caused by an “act of moral transgression” (Maguen & Litz, 2012). An extreme form of moral transgression is killing. Actually, human resource professionals in their organizational settings do not have to fire a weapon directly but, for instance, they have to give advice – in advance of a mission - on the adequateness (suitability) of front-line soldiers through assessment. In addition, a number of the human resource professionals (52.2%) serve parallel as military personnel and therefore they might also experience moral transgression during military interventions themselves. As such, the outreach of the actions of human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence is quite high and complex.

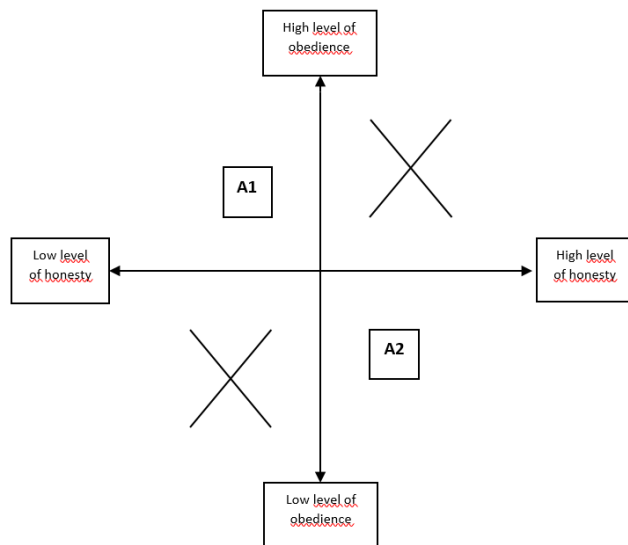
Next to the intrapersonal and interpersonal level, ethical dilemmas of human resource professionals affect also the organization itself as human resource management is key in each organization and ethical dilemmas might have a serious impact on the well-being as well as the functioning of the staff. The Dutch Ministry of Defence frequently has to deal with vital decisions concerning life and death as it is legitimized to use violence. As such, also the human resource professionals at the Ministry of Defence have to deal with these vital

decisions either directly if they also serve as military personnel or indirectly by giving advice on the adequateness of military personnel. In the worst case, ethical dilemmas can interfere the good functioning of the staff and the organization as the interests of all stakeholders might be incompatible. Consequently, moral decisions that, for instance, interfere with the official guidelines (dishonesty) or with the order of an executive (disobedience) might possibly lead to interpersonal conflicts or intrapersonal problems such as moral injury or guilt (Maguen & Litz, 2012). Therefore, the current study focuses on investigating the context as well as the content of the moral dilemmas and the moral decision making process of human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. In turn, this might function as a foundation for future solution finding such as moral decision making trainings, adjusting/new creation of official guidelines or ultimately a change in the organizational culture.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The issue of moral dilemmas is among others part of moral psychology. According to Sinnott-Armstrong (1987) moral dilemmas can be defined as “situations where there are non-overridden moral requirements for an agent to adopt incompatible alternatives”. In other words, ethical dilemmas are situations in which one has to choose between two or more alternatives that do not go together. The ethical component occurs due to the fact that one has to disregard one or more alternatives related to moral issues. The already mentioned example of an ethical dilemma (an executive wants/demands a human resource professional to actively manipulate the employee recruitment process - which is against the official guidelines) demonstrates two incompatible alternatives (Figure 1). Either the professional acts according to the demands of the executive (A1) which would show a high level of obedience/loyalty and a low level of honesty/compliance or the professional would act according to the official

guidelines (A2) by not manipulating the recruitment process which would show a high degree of honesty and a low degree of obedience.



*Figure 1.* Illustration of a possible moral dilemma (obedience vs. honesty): A1 (high on obedience and low on honesty) and A2 (high on honesty and low on obedience) represent the only possible alternatives while the two crosses represent incompatible options.

The process of decision making in the case of ethical dilemmas is called *moral judgement* and refers to a situation in which one has to identify and evaluate the different moral consequences of a certain decision (De Graaff, Den Besten, Giebels & Verweij, 2016).

Another definition rather describes moral judgement as an assessment of the moral correctness of an action and/or a character (cf. De Graaff et al., 2016). Therefore, the last stated definition implies that one's assessment underlies a certain set of moral principles (Haidt, 2001). However, there is still controversy about which role cognition and affect play during the decision making process. Actually, there are three approaches that dominate in the moral psychology.

The *cognitive approach* emphasises, as the name already suggests the importance of cognitive processes during moral judgement. As such, one consciously thinks through the

possible decisions and corresponding consequences (De Graaff et al., 2016). Thus, the decision maker is seen as a rationalistic moral reasoner. Emotions like disgust are considered to have an impact on the moral judgement process but they are not seen as a direct cause (Haidt, 2001). On the other hand, the *affective approach* stresses the importance of emotions as the cause of moral judgement. According to this approach, moral judgement is caused by effortless affective intuitions (Haidt, 2001). Conscious cognitions are only seen as “post hoc justifications” of moral judgement (Haidt, 2001).

A recent approach that combines and integrates the two opposing perspectives is the *integrative approach*. This approach emphasises that moral judgement is caused by “automatic sense-making processes” (De Graaff et al., 2016). In this context, moral judgement is caused by emotions that are influenced by cognitions. Thus, if one for instance feels disgust in the case of witnessing discrimination, the emotion “disgust” is influenced by advanced cognitions about the ethical construct of equality. However, there is still uncertainty about the role of cognition and emotion during moral judgement. In order to examine the different approaches regarding the moral decision making process, the majority of research nowadays still uses theoretical/hypothetical moral dilemmas. Two shining theoretical examples of moral dilemmas are called the *Trolley Dilemma* and the *Footbridge Dilemma* (Kahane & Shackel, 2010).

In the case of the *Trolley Dilemma*, a person stands before a train track and sees how a runaway trolley speeds down the railway track. Five people, tied to the track will certainly die if the train moves on. The untied person sees also a switch before these five people that would lead the train to a side track where just one person lies tied up. Also this person would die for sure if the switch would be activated. The untied person realizes the scenario and has to choose whether to activate the switch in order to divert the trolley from killing the five persons towards killing the single person.



On the other hand, in the case of the *Footbridge dilemma*, a person stands on a platform above a trolley track and sees how an uncontrolled train is barrelling down the track. In front of the trolley, five persons are tied down to the track. There is also a large man on the platform, leaning on the balustrades. Pushing the large man down to the track would instantly kill the man but also prevent the trolley from killing the five persons tied to the track. The other person on the platform realizes this scenario and has to choose whether to push the large man down or not.

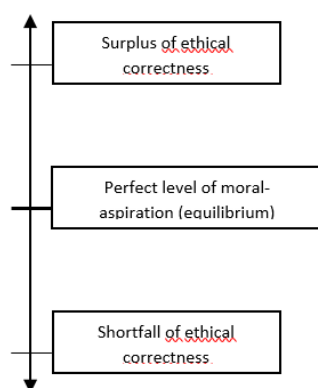
Both stated ethical dilemmas have in common that one has to make a decision but they also differ in terms of the degree of personal involvement. The *Footbridge Dilemma* represents a case of high personal involvement (*personal*). In such a case, the decision maker has to act directly like harming others by e.g. shooting them down. As such, one is judge and executioner at the same time. This situation causes emotional arousal and leads to an affect-laden moral processing route (Pellizzoni, Siegal & Surian, 2009). On the other hand, in situations of less personal involvement (*impersonal*), a processing route guided by abstract reasoning is activated (Pellizzoni et al., 2009). The *Trolley Dilemma* is a good example for this as one does not kill someone else “with the own hands” but rather indirect by activating the switch and therefore with less personal involvement. In this case, one has primarily the role of the judge and not of the executioner. There was also neurological evidence found for the distinction of personal and impersonal decision making (Greene et al., 2001). The brain activities of participants during personal, impersonal and non-moral conditions were observed with the help of neuroimaging. Brain areas (medial frontal gyrus, posterior cingulate gyrus and bilateral angular gyrus), associated with emotions were significantly more active during personal scenarios like the *Footbridge Dilemma* compared to impersonal and non-moral scenarios (Greene et al., 2001). In addition, another more philosophical distinction regarding ethical dilemmas respectively moral judgement can be made.

Friedrich Nietzsche said that there would be no facts, only interpretations (Wicks, 1997). This statement is especially relevant in the context of ethical dilemmas as they are more than other things a matter of interpretation. Actually, there are mainly two opposing philosophical approaches regarding moral decision making. On the one hand, *teleology* is goal driven – according to the principle “The ends justify the means” (Spinello, 2010). The most famous teleological approach is called *utilitarianism*. The basic principle of *utilitarianism* is to promote the general good, which is calculated by conducting a cost benefit analysis with the ultimate goal to benefit the majority of people affected by an action (Spinello, 2010). On the other hand, *deontology* is principle, duty or rule driven. The most famous deontological approach is Kant’s *categorical imperative*. According to Kant, one should act in accordance to the own maxims (Spinello, 2010). Both approaches can be perfectly applied on the two already stated theoretical dilemmas.

A study found, that in the case of the *Trolley dilemma*, the majority of participants would activate the switch in order to divert the trolley from killing the five persons towards killing the single person (Greene et al., 2001). As such, most participants weighed the benefits (saving five persons) higher than the costs (let one die). This kind of moral reasoning implies that the participants used a teleological approach. On the other hand, in the case of the *Footbridge dilemma*, most participants stated that they would not push the large man down to the track and consequently let the five persons tied to the track die. The act of pushing the man down was strongly associated with killing someone, which hurts a basic maxim of the participants. Thus, this kind of moral reasoning implies that the participants used a deontological approach.

These two concepts - teleology (outcome-based) and deontology (rule-based) - are also highly relevant in the context of the dynamics of moral behaviour. An important issue of the dynamics of moral behaviour is the concept of moral self-regulation (Cornelissen et al.,

2013). Actually, there are two opposing approaches of moral self-regulation. On the one hand, moral balancing refers to the concept that individuals seek a certain level of moral-aspiration which is determined by ethical and unethical acts (Cornelissen et al., 2013). However, a perfect level of moral-aspiration (equilibrium) cannot be reached and as such, one always has to balance the level of moral aspiration by acting ethically correct or not. Thus, for example engaging mainly in ethically correct acts might resolve in a surplus that has to be reduced in order to reach the equilibrium by acting ethically incorrect and vice versa (Cornelissen et al., 2013) (Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Illustration of a moral-aspiration scale for moral balancing of (un)ethical acting.

In practice, if an ethically responsible act like, for example, donating blood would result into even more surplus of ethical correctness on one's moral-aspiration scale, it would be more likely that one would refuse to donate blood. This kind of behaviour would be classified as moral balancing.

On the other hand, moral consistency refers to the pattern that acting ethical or unethical increases the probability of acting in a similar manner later on (Cornelissen et al., 2013). Thus, donating blood would consequently increase the likelihood of engaging in ethically responsible acts like, for instance, helping people in need at a later time. Recent research found that engaging in moral consistency is mediated by a deontological (rule-based)

mind-set (Cornelissen et al., 2013). In contrast to this, engaging in moral balancing was found to be mediated by a teleological (outcome-based) mind-set (Cornelissen et al., 2013).

Summarized, one can say that there is little research done on analysing moral dilemmas of human resource professionals. Previous studies found that the degree of personal involvement as well as the kind of moral mind-set influence the moral decision making process (Greene et al., 2001; Cornelissen et al., 2013). However, these studies only used hypothetical moral dilemmas. There is also a clear lack of studies that are focusing on human resource professionals, although human resource professionals might be one of the most vulnerable and relevant target groups regarding the moral decision making process in the case of moral dilemmas. As such, the first step in the current study includes a content analysis in order to identify the various topics of the moral dilemmas that a human resource professional has to face at the Dutch Ministry of Defence.

***RQ1:*** Which types/topics of moral dilemmas do human resource professionals experience at the Dutch Ministry of Defence?

After this, the moral dilemmas are categorized in terms of the degree of personal involvement of the human resource professionals.

***RQ2:*** What is the ratio of impersonal and personal moral dilemmas that human resource professionals experience at the Dutch Ministry of Defence?

Finally, the deontological and teleological arguments used by the human resource professionals to describe their dilemmas are identified.

***RQ3:*** Which deontological and teleological arguments do human resource professionals use in order to describe/analyse their experienced moral dilemmas at the Dutch Ministry of Defence?

## **Methods:**

### **Recent research/Design:**

In 2015, a still ongoing project started in order to support human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence with their daily tasks (Divisie Personeel & Organisatie Defensie, 2014). Part of this project are group training sessions that, among other things, aim to explore and discuss moral dilemmas of the professionals within groups consisting of up to twelve human resource professionals and at least one trainer/facilitator/consultant from the Dutch consultancy firm Governance & Integrity or from a pool of trainers from the Dutch Ministry of Defence itself. Transcripts of the training sessions, written by the corresponding trainers (with the approval of the participants) form the basis of the recent research. As such, the essence of the current research is a narrative content analysis with the goal to explore and categorize the different topics of moral dilemmas that human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence have to face (RQ1), to determine the degree of personal involvement regarding the different cases (RQ2) and to explore which corresponding deontological and teleological arguments are considered by the professionals (RQ3). For the current study, transcripts of 42 group training sessions ( $N = 42$ ) were analysed – or more precisely the moral dilemmas of the participants that were mentioned during the training sessions and recorded by the trainer. In order to analyse the data, three raters rated the written down transcripts of the moral decision making trainings with the help of a coding guide (Appendix A). In the final step, the results of the three raters were analysed and compared by means of calculating Fleiss' kappa with "Microsoft Excel" in order to determine the inter-rater reliability.

### **Participants:**

The sample consisted of approximately 513 ( $N = 513$ ) – status May 2016 - human resource professionals of the Dutch Ministry of Defence that function either as employment advice worker/career guide (loopbaanbegeleider) ( $N = 166$ ) or as advisor for personnel and

organization (personeel en organisatie adviseur) ( $N = 347$ ). 245 ( $N = 245$ ) of the human resource professionals were citizens (47.8%) while 268 of the human resource professionals served parallel as military personnel (52.2%). The participants were 23 to 66 years old ( $M = 44$ ). The sample consisted of 296 ( $N = 296$ ) men (57.7%) and 217 women (42.3%).

The three raters were 23, 24 and 25 years old. Two of them were male undergraduate psychology students. The third rater was a female university graduate working as business developer.

### **Material:**

#### ***Transcripts from Governance & Integrity***

The moral decision making trainings were recorded by the consultants/trainers with the help of a template (Figure 3). On the top of the template, the case number, date, trainer, and case title could be filled in. There was also an empty field to fill in background information like the motivation and atmosphere of the participants. Part of the consultants also used an alternative transcript template (Figure 4). However, the two templates only differed slightly. The most relevant parts of the first transcript (Figure 3) regarding the recent research were “achtergrond”, “stap 1: de beslissing” and “stap 5: argumenten”. The equivalents of the second transcript (Figure 4) were “inventariseren van de voorbeelden”, “korte omschrijving

casus”, “stap 1: Voor welke beslissing sta ik?” and “stap 5: Argumenten”.

**U kunt er op vertrouwen dat de casus vertrouwelijk wordt behandeld en onder geen beding openbaar wordt gemaakt.**

**Het verslag**

Verslag moreel beraad		
Case nummer:		
Datum:		
Begeleider:		
Titel casus:		
Achtergrond:		
Stap 1: de beslissing		
Voorlopige beslissing:		
Stap 2: betrokkenen		
Stap 5: argumenten		
Stap 6: beslissing		
De beslissing		
Compensatie		
Morele beginselen		
Kerndilemma's		
Labels		
Moresprudentie		

*Figure 3. (first) Template for a transcript of a moral decision making training*

## Trainingsverslag

Account:

Datum:

Trainer:

Groep:

1. Aanwezigheid
2. Sfeer
3. Inleiding
4. Inventariseren van de voorbeelden
5. Plenair en/of in subgroep behandelde casussen

Korte omschrijving casus:

Escaleer ik de kwestie (nog een keer)? Of laat ik het zo?

Stap 1: Voor welke beslissing sta ik?

Stap 2: Betrokkenen

Stap 3

Stap 4 (vragen + antwoorden)

Stap 5: (vraag, zie stap 1)

Argumenten voor de handeling:

Argumenten voor het sterkste alternatief:

Geef aan wat B's, G's of S'en zijn.

Benoem de B's expliciet, geef aan welke rechten eronder liggen.

Stap 6: Conclusie

6B: schade beperken

Stap 7: Voel ik mij goed over de genomen beslissing?

Stap voor de trainer: Wat mij opvalt aan de manier waarop men hier afweegt:

6. Afronding
7. Wat mij als trainer opvalt

Figure 4. Alternative (second) template for a transcript of a moral decision making training

The parts “achtergrond”, “inventariseren van de voorbeelden” and “korte omschrijving casus” were aimed to describe the different moral dilemmas of the participants. “Stap 1: de beslissing” and “stap 1: Voor welke beslissing sta ik?” were aimed to describe the two incompatible action alternatives regarding one plenary analysed moral dilemma. Finally, “stap 5: argumenten” gave space to list up all pro arguments per action alternative.



### ***Coding guide***

The raters were instructed to use a coding guide in a determined order. The coding guide (Appendix A) starts with a short description of the goal of the research and instructions regarding the coding process. After this, a screenshot of a coded and labelled example case is presented. The next pages display the tabular coding guide itself. The guide consists of three columns. The first column includes the main codes and sub codes. In total, there are four different main codes (A, B, C and D). Code A consists of seven sub codes (A1-A7). Code B consists of two sub codes (B1 and B2). Code C consists of nine sub codes (C1-C9) and code D consists of three sub codes (D1-D3).

The second column includes a description of the different types of the codes. Code A types are about the different topics of the moral dilemmas, subdivided into sub codes containing seven different topics (A1 Entitlement to get advice; A2 Insights/Knowledge about sensitive data; A3 Contradicting/Inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values; A4 Scope of responsibility; A5 Hierarchical pressure; A6 Organizational interest vs. individual interest; A7 Impartiality). Code B types describes the degree of personal involvement, subdivided into impersonal (B1), personal (B2) and other (B3). Code C types include the type of argument, classified into nine different argument groups (C1 Human resource official guidelines; C2 Law; C3 Code of practice – Ministry of Defence; C4 Consequences for the corresponding human resource professional + relatives; C5 Consequences for the human resource department; C6 Consequences for the Ministry of Defence; C7 Consequences for the corresponding executive + relatives; C8 Consequences for the corresponding/affected employee(s) + relatives; C9 Other). The code D types are about the philosophical background of the arguments, divided into deontological (D1), teleological (D2) and other (D3). The third column contains a brief explanation of each code/type and an illustrating example.

## **Procedure:**

### ***About the training sessions (data gathering)***

Overall, the procedure of the training session for moral decision making of human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence was related to the template transcripts (Figure 3&4) for the trainers/consultants. At the beginning of each session, the trainer welcomed all participants and checked the attendance. After this, every participant had to introduce oneself briefly. In order to create a trustful atmosphere, the trainer emphasized that everything coming up during the session would not be discussed outside the training-session or with other parties. Next, the trainer asked for the expectations about the training session of each participant. Furthermore, the current knowledge of the participants regarding some key terms like moral decision making, moral dilemmas, norms, values, guilt, shame, deontological arguments, teleological arguments etc. was assessed by asking questions. Based on the answers of the group, the trainer decided how extensively certain knowledge had to be deepened before every participant shortly described a recent moral dilemma by which the corresponding participant is or was affected in his/her role as human resource professional. Before this, it was again emphasized that nobody will be assessed or criticised based on one's dilemma. After everyone described his/her case, the group decided which case they would like to discuss as a group in depth. Next, the participant who brought up the chosen case had to describe his/her moral dilemma in detail. Hereafter, the group determined the two incompatible action alternatives for the human resource professional in the corresponding case/moral dilemma. In the next step, all stakeholders and affected persons were named by the group and it was determined which of the stakeholders had to make the decision. During the next step, it was ensured that every necessary information was available in order to make a responsible decision. After this, pro arguments for each of the two action alternatives were gathered and labelled as either consequence, principle, fact or excuse. Before it was

determined which of the arguments were the most important, it was checked if every stakeholder was included in terms of an argument. Finally, the people were asked which decision they would make and how they would feel after the decision making. Also, another case was analysed if the group desired. At the end of the session, the trainer initiated a debriefing where every participant had the chance to ask questions and everyone had to talk about what he/she learned from the training.

### ***About the coding process***

In total, three raters analysed the data with the help of the coding scheme. In the first rating session, the raters were introduced to the topic and to the key terms that are necessary in order to understand the coding scheme and to get shared mental models. After this, the coding scheme was handed over and the raters had to sign an informed consent. The raters were introduced to the coding scheme and seven cases of moral dilemmas at the Dutch Ministry of Defence were analysed, discussed and coded together. Hereafter, the raters were instructed that they had to decide for each case/argument which of the corresponding sub codes (A1, A2...B1, B2...) were the most applicable. If more than one sub code seemed to be applicable per case/argument, one only had to choose the sub code that seemed to be the most applicable. Thus, per case/argument one could only choose a single sub code per coding category. If one of the raters made a decision, one had to mark/label the corresponding text as well as comment it with the applicable sub code. In conclusion, the description of the case had to be commented with one of the sub codes A1-A7 as well as with one of the sub codes B1/B2. Each argument had to be commented with one of the sub codes C1-C9 plus one of the sub codes D1/D2/D3. The raters were also instructed that they were not allowed to talk to each other about anything related to the current research during the coding process. After the instructions were clear, the raters were placed in front of one notebook per rater. With the help of the programme "Microsoft Word", the raters had to mark and comment the transcripts.

When the raters were finished with a transcript, the next transcript was opened for them. After the raters finished a coding session, the ratings of the marked and commented transcripts were manually transferred to a “Microsoft Excel” worksheet (Figure 5).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1													
2		Topic								Degree of personal involvement			
3		A1 Entitler	A2 Insights	A3 Contrac	A4 Scope c	A5 Hierarc	A6 Organiz	A7 Imparti	Pi	Impersonal		Personal	Pi
4	Clas 1.1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	3		0	1
5	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0,33	0		3	1
6	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	2		1	0,33
7	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0		3	1

Figure 5. Extract of the Microsoft Excel worksheet

### Data analysis:

The total sum/frequency ratings regarding the different topics (sub codes A1-A7) and the degree of personal involvement (sub codes B1/B2) were calculated by summing the ratings (of all three raters) of all cases per sub code. In the extract presented in figure 5 for example, the total sum for sub code A1 would be equal 0 (0 + 0 + 0 + 0), the sum for A2 would be equal 5 (3 + 2 + 0 + 0), the sum for A3 equal 0 (0 + 0 + 0 + 0), the sum for A4 equal 0 (0 + 0 + 0 + 0), the sum for A5 equal 3 (0 + 0 + 3 + 0), the sum for A6 equal 3 (0 + 0 + 0 + 3), the sum for A7 equal 1 (0 + 1 + 0 + 0), the sum for sub code impersonal (B1) equal 5 (3 + 0 + 2 + 0) and the sum for sub code personal (B2) equal 7 (0 + 3 + 1 + 3).

The used deontological and teleological arguments were counted per topic/sub code (A1-A7) in order to calculate the amount and percentage. Each case and the corresponding arguments were taken into account for a certain sub code (A1-A7) if at least one rater rated the case to be part of the sub code. Thus, in the presented extract of the Microsoft Excel worksheet (Figure 5), the documented arguments related to the case in the fifth row of the worksheet, have been taken into account for sub code A2 as well as sub code A7. The impersonal and personal ratings per topic were only taken into account if two or more raters agreed with regard to the topic of the case.

## **Results:**

The analysis and coding of the 42 transcripts resulted in a total amount of 271 cases ( $N = 271$ ) of moral dilemmas of human resource professional at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. 40 cases were not usable (due to insufficient recording or because the recorded moral dilemmas did not belong to the human resource domain) so that 231 ( $N = 231$ ) cases were analysed and coded regarding the topic of the dilemma and the degree of personal involvement. 51 ( $N = 51$ ) out of 231 cases were transcribed with corresponding arguments. As such, the deontological and teleological arguments were based on 51 cases of moral dilemmas that were discussed in depth during the training sessions. The maximum rating (100%) per sub code - regarding the frequency of the topic and the degree of personal involvement - that was achievable was 693 (231 cases multiplied by 3 raters).

Overall, the rating for the sub code “impersonal” regarding all cases was equivalent to 397 (57.3%) while the rating for the sub code “personal” was equivalent to 296 (42.7%). The Fleiss’ kappa value for the “degree of personal involvement ratings” (sub codes: B1&B2) was equivalent to 0.72 ( $K = 0.72$ ). Almost similar to this, the Fleiss’ kappa value for the “topic ratings” (sub codes: A1-A7) was equivalent to 0.71 ( $K = 0.71$ ). The total sum/frequency ratings regarding the different topics (sub codes A1-A7) and the degree of personal involvement (sub codes B1/B2) are summarized presented in table 1. Table 2 shows the most important used deontological and teleological arguments per topic/sub code (A1-A7). After table 1 and table 2, the results are described in depth per topic of the moral dilemmas (sub code A1-A7). For each topic, a representative example of a moral dilemma is described from the recent research, followed by the overall ratings per topic (sub codes A1-A7) and the corresponding impersonal and personal ratings (sub codes B1/B2). Additionally, the most important deontological and teleological arguments are described per topic.

**Table 1.** Total sum/frequency ratings regarding the 7 topics of moral dilemmas and the corresponding ratings regarding the degree of personal involvement per topic (the proportion of rather impersonal and rather personal cases of moral dilemmas per topic)

Type	Total	Total	Total
	sum/frequency	sum/frequency	sum/frequency
	of topic ratings	of impersonal ratings (B1)	of personal ratings (B2)
A1: Entitlement to get advice	48 (7%)	65 (77.4%)	19 (22.6%)
A2: Insights/knowledge about sensitive data	44 (6.4%)	29 (51%)	28 (49%)
A3: Contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values	148 (21.4%)	111 (79%)	30 (21%)
A4: Scope of responsibility	23 (3.3%)	30 (91%)	3 (9%)
A5: Hierarchical pressure	137 (19.8%)	23 (17%)	115 (83%)
A6: Organizational interest vs. individual interest	265 (38.2%)	174 (67%)	87 (33%)
A7: Impartiality	28 (4%)	4 (15%)	23 (85%)

**Table 2.** Important deontological and teleological arguments per topic of the moral dilemmas (sub code A1-A7)

Type	Important deontological arguments	Important teleological arguments
A1: Entitlement to get advice (9 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “official guidelines of human resource professionals” (67%);</li> <li>• “good employers” official guideline (22%);</li> <li>• “recht op inspanning” (22%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consequences for the affected employee(s) (67%);</li> <li>• consequences for the affected executive (22%);</li> <li>• maintaining individual relations (22%);</li> <li>• positive consequences for the organization (22%)</li> </ul>
A2: Insights/knowledge about sensitive data (2 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “entitlement of the organization/executives to get all necessary information” (100%);</li> <li>• “official guidelines of human resource professionals” (100%);</li> <li>• “confidentiality” (100%);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “consequences for affected employee(s)” (100%);</li> <li>• “maintaining individual relations (50%);</li> <li>• “feeling of justice” (50%);</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “duty of care” (50%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “image of the human resource department (50%); image of the ministry (50%)</li> </ul>
A3: Contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values (14 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (79%);</li> <li>• “good employers” official guideline (36%);</li> <li>• “proportionality guideline” (21%);</li> <li>• “duty of care” (21%);</li> <li>• “the law within defence” (36%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “good consequences for the affected employee(s)” (79%);</li> <li>• “image of the ministry” (57%),</li> <li>• “maintaining individual relations” (21%)</li> </ul>
A4: Scope of responsibility (2 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “professionalism” (100%);</li> <li>• “duty/entitlement to give advice” (50%);</li> <li>• “duty of care” (50%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “consequences for the affected employee(s)” (100%),</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “consequences for the ministry (50%);</li> <li>• consequences for the affected human resource professional (50%)</li> </ul>
A5: Hierarchical pressure (18 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (94%);</li> <li>• “code of practice”/“order is order” (39%);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “maintain individual relations” (61%);</li> <li>• “feeling of justice” (61%);</li> <li>• consequences for the affected employee(s) (50%);</li> <li>• consequences for the executive (22%);</li> <li>• consequences for the affected department (22%);</li> <li>• “consequences for ministry/department (executive knows it best)” (17%)</li> </ul>

A6: Organizational interest vs. individual interest (22 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (50%);</li> <li>• “good employers” official guideline (23%);</li> <li>• “law of the ministry” (18%);</li> <li>• “entitlement of the organization/executives to get all necessary information” (18%);</li> <li>• “proportionality” guideline (18%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “consequences for the employee(s)” (82%);</li> <li>• “consequences for the organization” (50%);</li> <li>• “maintaining individual relations” (32%)</li> </ul>
A7: Impartiality (4 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “human resource official guidelines” (100%);</li> <li>• “code of practice” (50%);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “feeling of justice” (50%);</li> <li>• “maintaining individual relations” (75%);</li> <li>• “consequences for the Ministry of Defence” (25%)</li> </ul>

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### ***A1 - Entitlement to get advice***

*Example: An employee completed his training but wants to quit the service (his job does not match his expectations). However, he has to repay the costs of his training if he quits the service without fulfilling the obligatory service period. Additionally, the executives do not want him to quit his service. Do I advise him to violate his official duties in order to provoke his dismissal (in the case of dismissal, he does not have to repay the costs) or not?*

*Voorbeeld: Medewerker heeft zijn opleiding voltooid maar wil graag de dienst verlaten (Werk past niet bij hem, heeft zich vergist). Echter moet hij de kosten voor zijn opleiding terugbetalen als hij de dienst binnen de verplichte tijdruimte verlaat. De leiding wil hem niet laten gaan. Adviseer ik om hem niet aan zijn dienstverplichting te houden om ontslag te provoceren (in het geval van ontslag moet hij de kosten niet terugbetalen) of niet?*

The rating for sub code A1 (Entitlement to get advice) constituted 48 (7%). The corresponding “impersonal ratings” (sub code B1) were equivalent to 65 (77.4%) and the “personal ratings” (sub code B2) equal to 19 (22.6%). The content analysis revealed that the cases of this sub code are highly diverse. Still, important deontological (beginsel) arguments that were named regularly were the “good employers” official guideline (goed werkgeverschap beginsel) (2 out of 9 cases – 22%) and the “recht op inspanning” (2 out of 9 cases – 22%) that contradicted sometimes with the “good employee” guideline (goed werknemerschap) (1 out of 9 cases – 11%), and the “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (P&O beginselen) (6 out of 9 cases – 67%) like “equal treatment” or “working according to the procedure”. The most important teleological arguments (gevolgen) that contradicted regularly were “positive consequences for the employee” (6 out of 9 cases – 67%) like financial benefits, “positive consequences for the affected executive” (2 out of 9 cases – 22%), “maintaining individual relations” (2 out of 9 cases – 22%) and “positive consequences for the organization” (2 out of 9 cases – 22%) like cost savings.

## ***A2 – Insights/Knowledge about sensitive data***

*Example: An employee mentions during a confidential talk that he receives medical treatment but he does not want me to share this information. The executive of the corresponding employee already wants to take formal action since the employee does not perform good anymore. Do I share the information about the medical treatment in order to justify the bad performance of the employee?*

*Voorbeeld: Tijdens een vertrouwelijk gesprek deelt een medewerker mee dat hij in medische procedure zit (wil deze informatie verder met niemand delen). De lijnmanager van deze medewerker wil functioneringstraject voor de betrokkene medewerker omdat hij niet meer goed functioneert. Deel ik de vertrouwelijke informatie (medische procedure) met de lijnmanager om het slecht functioneren van de medewerker uit te leggen?*

The rating for sub code A2 (Insights/Knowledge about sensitive data) constituted 44 (6.4%). The corresponding “impersonal ratings” were equal to 29 (51%) and the “personal ratings” equal to 28 (49%). Popular topics within this sub code were abuse of the access to the information database for own/colleague benefits and sharing of information from confidential talks. Popular deontological arguments that were named are the “entitlement of the organization/executives to get all necessary information” (recht op een volledig beeld/alle informatie) (2 out of 2 cases – 100%), the “duty of care” (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), “confidentiality” (2 out of 2 cases – 100%), “privacy” (2 out of 2 cases – 100%) and the “official guidelines of human resource professionals” (2 out of 2 cases – 100%) like “equal treatment”, “working according to the procedure” and “transparency”. Important teleological arguments were “individual relations” (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), “feeling of justice” (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), “image of the ministry” (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), “image of the human resource department” (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), and “positive consequences for affected employee” (2 out of 2 cases – 100%). All of these arguments were incompatible in various compositions.

### ***A3 – Contradicting/Inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values***

*Example: An employee hears that his recent job will be terminated in the middle of the year 2015 due to reorganization. He is a military who did not work in his job for 2 years and therefore, he has to wait officially (and work) until march 2016 to apply for a new job at the Ministry of Defence. Actually, he would like to work close to his home since he is also care-giver at home. There is a job offer (job would be close to his home) for the first December 2015 that he wants to apply for. However, it is against the official guidelines to give him a new job at the Ministry of Defence within the 2 years remaining time of his recent job – but this job will be terminated. Can I decrease the official remaining time of his recent job in order to give the employee the opportunity to apply earlier?*

*Voorbeeld: Medewerker hoort dat hij medio 2015 zijn functie door reorganisatie zal komen te verdwijnen. Het is een militair die nog geen 2 jaar op functie zit en pas beschikbaar komt voor nieuwe functie in maart 2016. Formeel mag hij pas vanaf die datum mee solliciteren en moet hij tot die tijd zijn huidige functie blijven vervullen. In zijn thuissituatie is hij mantelzorger daarom wil hij graag dicht bij huis werken. Er is een vacature die hem past per 1 december 2015. Er zijn nog geen andere belangstellenden. Het is tegen de regelgeving om hem binnen 2 jaar een andere functie te geven, maar deze functie komt toch te verdwijnen. Kan ik dan de “vrijvaldatum” een paar maanden naar voren halen ten gunste van de medewerker*

Sub code A3 (Contradicting/Inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values) got a rating of 148 (21.4%). The “impersonal ratings” were equal to 111 (79%) and the “personal ratings” equal to 30 (21%). Typical topics within this sub code were for example employee requests that should be declined according to the official guidelines for human resource professionals (e.g.: equal treatment) but that would have good consequences for the affected employee (sometimes also for the organization – win/win) and no direct negatively affected

parties. The deontological argument “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (e.g.: work according to procedure and equal treatment) (11 out of 14 cases – 79%) contradicted frequently with other deontological arguments like “proportionality” (3 out of 14 cases – 21%), “duty of care” (3 out of 14 cases – 21%), “good employers” official guideline (5 out of 14 cases – 36%), “the law within defence” (5 out of 14 cases – 36%) and the teleological arguments “good consequences for the affected employee(s)” (11 out of 14 cases – 79%), “image of the ministry” (8 out of 14 cases – 57%) and “maintaining individual relations” (3 out of 14 cases – 21%).

#### ***A4 – Scope of responsibility***

*Example: I detect that a reintegration arrangement is not implemented correctly due to a mistake. Assurances were made and everyone is happy with the present situation. Shall I report the mistake or shall I neglect it?*

*Voorbeeld: Ik ontdek dat een re-integratieregeling niet goed wordt toegepast. Er is een fout gemaakt. Er zijn toezeggingen gedaan en iedereen is tevreden met de huidige situatie. Ga ik daar actief in optreden of laat ik het zo?*

The rating for sub code A4 (Scope of responsibility) was equivalent to 23 (3.3%). The “impersonal ratings” was equal to 30 (91%) while the “personal ratings” were equal to 3 (9%). Popular cases within this sub code were human resource professionals that thought about taking action but did not know if they were obliged or allowed to do so. Deontological arguments that played a matter were for example “professionalism” (2 out of 2 cases – 100%), the “duty of care” (1 out of 2 cases, 50%) and the “duty/entitlement to give advice” (also unasked) (1 out of 2 cases – 50%). In addition, teleological arguments in terms of consequences for the organization (1 out of 2 cases – 50%), the affected employee(s) (2 out of 2 cases – 100%) or the affected human resource professional (1 out of 2 cases – 50%) were crucial.

## **A5 – Hierarchical pressure**

*Example: I am forced by my manager to initiate a re-allocation of three employees. The problem is that this is not in accordance with the rules and that the new functions of the employees are not officially advertised. Due to this, no other applicants might get the chance to apply for the jobs which is against the official application procedure. After I have reported this inconsistency with the official guidelines, the executive threatened with bad consequences for me. What shall I do?*

*Voorbeeld: Ik word door mijn leidinggevende en de commandant gedwongen om een verplaatsing van drie medewerkers naar een nieuwe functie te regelen. Probleem is echter dat deze actie ingaat tegen de afspraken en regels, en dat die nieuwe functies niet vacant zijn verklaard (en dus niet zijn gepubliceerd/opengesteld). Hierdoor kunnen andere geïnteresseerden zich niet presenteren voor de nieuwe functie. Er wordt dus geen normale selectieprocedure gevolgd. Nadat ik heb aangegeven dat dit zo niet kan wordt er gedreigd dat ik op het matje moet komen als ik de dienstopdracht van mijn manager weiger. Wat te doen?*

Sub code A5 (Hierarchical pressure) got a rating equal to 137 (19.8%). The “impersonal ratings” was equal to 23 (17%) and the “personal ratings” equal to 115 (83%). Most of the cases within this sub code had to do with an executive who wanted something (related to applications, redundancy, further education, employee placement and promotion) from the affected human resource professional that was not conform with the official guidelines. The most often stated deontological argument was acting according to the “official guidelines for human resource professionals” (17 out of 18 cases – 94%) and connected arguments like “equal treatment” or “transparency” that contradicted with the code of practice “order is order” (7 out of 18 cases – 39%). Important teleological arguments that were connected to this were “Maintain/improve (or do not worsen) the individual relation with the executive” (11 out of 18 cases – 61%), a feeling of justice (11 out of 18 cases – 61%), positive/negative

consequences for the affected employee(s) (9 out of 18 cases – 50%), consequences for the executive (4 out of 18 cases – 22%), consequences for the affected department (4 out of 18 cases – 22%) and positive consequences for the organization/affected department (“executive knows it best”) (3 out of 18 cases – 17%).

#### ***A6 – Organizational interest vs. individual interest***

*Example: I am the chairman of a commission regarding theft research. The suspected employee has been working for the Ministry of Defence for a very long time. Property of the Ministry was found at the employee's home that should have already returned to the Ministry. According to the employee, his spouse unloaded the material belonging to the Ministry from his official car during a business trip. After this, he forgot the material because it was not in his car anymore. Do I advise to impose penalty or not (e.g. due to his loyalty etc.)?*

*Voorbeeld: Ik ben voorzitter van een commissie - onderzoek m.b.t. diefstal. De betrokkene medewerker is al op leeftijd en lange tijd binnen defensie werkzaam. Spullen (eigendom van defensie) zijn thuis bij de betrokkene medewerker gevonden die hij eigenlijk al had moeten terugbrengen. Volgens de medewerker heeft zijn vrouw de spullen tijdens een dienstreis uit de dienstauto geladen en daarom is hij vergeten de spullen terug te brengen. Adviseer ik het opleggen van boete of zie ik het door de vingers (bijvoorbeeld omdat hij al lang een loyale medewerker was etc.)?*

The rating for sub code A6 (Organizational interest vs. individual interest) constituted 265 (38.2%). The corresponding “impersonal ratings” were equal to 174 (67%) and the “personal ratings” equal to 87 (33%). The cases of moral dilemmas within this sub code were highly diverse. Popular deontological arguments were acting according to the “human resource official guidelines” (11 out of 22 cases – 50%) that contradicted frequently with the “good employers” official guideline (5 out of 22 cases – 23%), the “code of practice” (7 out of 22 cases – 32%) like “order is order”, the “law of the ministry” (4 out of 22 cases – 18%), the



“entitlement of the organization/executives to get all necessary information” (4 out of 22 cases – 18%) and the “proportionality” guideline (4 out of 22 cases – 18%). Important teleological arguments were “good consequences for the employee(s)” (18 out of 22 cases – 82%), “maintaining individual relations” (7 out of 22 cases – 32%) and “good consequences for the organization” (11 out of 22 cases – 50%) like image (of the ministry as employer) improvement or cost savings.

### ***A7 – Impartiality***

*Example: A friend of mine asks for extra training and tips for an application within the Ministry of Defence. Do I help him with this?*

*Voorbeeld: Vriend vraagt voor tips en extra training voor een sollicitatie bij defensie. Doe ik dat voor hem?*

Sub code A7 (Impartiality) got a rating equivalent to 28 (4%). The “impersonal rating” was equal to 4 (15%) and the “personal rating” equal to 23 (85%). A typical case within this sub code was a colleague/friend who asked the human resource professional for a favour like giving extra job application training. The most important deontological argument was to follow the “human resource official guidelines” (4 out of 4 cases – 100%) like equal treatment or transparency and the “code of practice” (2 out of 4 cases – 50%). Important teleological arguments were the “feeling of justice” (2 out of 4 cases – 50%) that contradicted with improving/not worsen the individual relation with the colleague/friend (3 out of 4 cases – 75%) as well as with “consequences for the affected employee(s)” and “consequences for the Ministry of Defence” (each 1 out of 4 cases – 25%).

### **Discussion:**

The purpose of the study was to explore and categorize the various topics, corresponding degrees of personal involvement and contents (in terms of arguments) of moral dilemmas that

human resource professionals have to face at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. In order to answer the first research question (RQ1), the results showed that the great majority of the analysed moral dilemmas of human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence can be categorized in terms of the topics “organizational interest vs. individual interest”, “contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values” and “hierarchical pressure” (Figure 6). The topics “scope of responsibility” and “impartiality” had the lowest ratings.

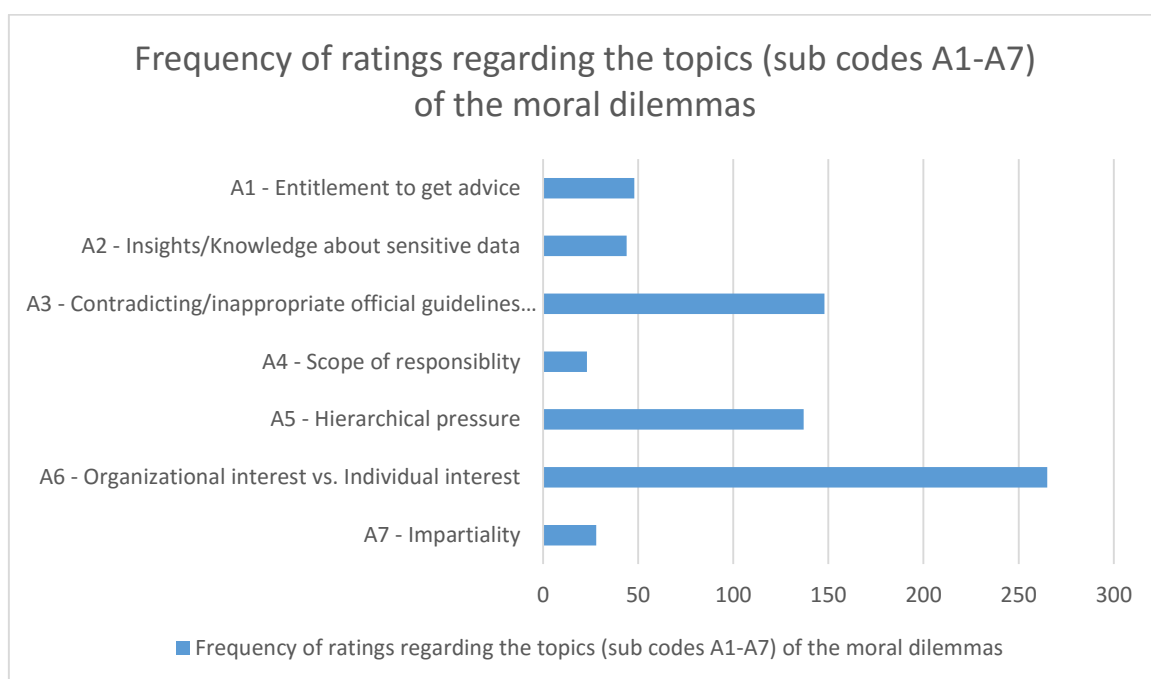


Figure 6. Frequency of ratings regarding the topic of the moral dilemmas

Regarding the second research question (RQ2), the topics that included the most personal cases were “impartiality” (85%), “hierarchical pressure” (83%) and “insights/knowledge about sensitive data” (49%). An example of a highly personal case from the recent research is the following:

*A friend of mine asks for extra training and tips for an application at the Ministry of Defence. Do I help him with this?*

In this case, the moral dilemma is directly related to an interpersonal relationship (friendship) that might be at stake – which is a clear indicator for a high degree of personal involvement. Especially these more personal cases of moral dilemmas cause more emotional arousal and lead to an affect-laden moral processing route (Pellizzoni et al., 2009). This might be particularly relevant, since many of the stated deontological and teleological arguments could be irrelevant if a processing-route guided by emotions would be activated.

The topics with the lowest personal ratings were “scope of responsibility” (9%), “contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values” (21%) and “entitlement to get advice” (22.6%). Thus, moral dilemmas related to these three topics tend to be less personal and therefore possibly lead to a more cognitive moral processing route (Pellizzoni et al., 2009). An example for a rather impersonal case from the recent research is the following:

*An employee hears that his recent job will be terminated in the middle of the year 2015 due to reorganization. He is a military who did not work in his job for 2 years and therefore, he has to wait (and work in his job) officially until march 2016 in order to apply for a new job at the Ministry of Defence. Actually, he would like to work close to his home since he is also care-giver at home. There is a job offer (job would be close to his home) for the first December 2015 that he wants to apply for. However, it is against the official guidelines to give him a new job at the Ministry of Defence within the 2 years remaining time of his recent job – but the recent job will be terminated. Can I decrease the official remaining time of his recent job in order to give the employee the opportunity to apply earlier?*

This case was rated by all raters as rather impersonal because no inevitable interpersonal conflict would arise due to the decision of the human resource professional. However, it also illustrates the fine line between personal and impersonal cases. If the affected employee would have been a good colleague of the human resource professional,

most likely all raters would have rated the case as personal, which in turn could influence the weighing of the different arguments.

By answering the third research question (RQ3), the great variety of different arguments already indicates the high complexity of tasks that human resource professionals have to face at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. From a deontological perspective, the results show that the official guidelines for human resource professionals contradicted (especially “equal treatment”, “transparency”, “working according to the official procedure”) together with the “duty/entitlement to give advice” and the “entitlement of the organization/executive to get all necessary information”) frequently with other official guidelines (that are often very flexible inherent and therefore a matter of interpretation) like: The “Duty of care” guideline, the “good employers” guideline and the “proportionality” guideline. On the other hand, also a variety of teleological arguments were involved like various consequences for the affected human resource professional (e.g. feeling of justice), for the affected employee(s) and for the organization/the Ministry of Defence.

Especially these teleological arguments have to be weighed by the professionals regarding for example long-term and short-term consequences. All of the named arguments occurred in a broad variety of incompatible variations. This illustrates the highly complex tasks of the human resource professionals and shows why especially this target group is at risk to frequently experience serious moral dilemmas. Many moral dilemmas like “organizational interest vs. individual interest” (and the related topic “Entitlement to get advice”) might be inevitable and therefore, the human resource professionals have to learn to deal with moral dilemmas adequately – which could be morally challenging. In which cases are the needs of the individual more important than the needs of the organization? Based on the high number of ratings for sub code A6, this kind of question seem to be highly relevant and possibly morally challenging for the human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence.

In this context, also the dimension of personal involvement becomes relevant. The simple fact that human resource professionals are also humans that frequently have to decide/advice on vital decisions (like dismissal) regarding other people shows the high personal involvement of their daily tasks. Therefore, it is also highly challenging to stay objective and to maintain a feeling of justice, as advising on vital decisions could go together with the risk of a guilty conscience and ultimately moral injury (Maguen & Litz, 2012).

Of course, also human resource professionals have personal relations within an organization and especially these relations might cause the risk of applying double standards. For example, in the case of the most commonly rated topic “organizational interest vs. individual interest”, the sympathy of the human resource professional for the affected employee might play a great role (which makes it also a case of the topic “impartiality”). It might be possible that a professional who likes an affected employee might rather advice in favour of the employee than in favour of the organization. On the other hand, if the human resource professional does not like the affected employee, he/she might decide rather in favour of the organization. Additionally, one even might be unaware of the sympathy for a certain employee. The human resource professional does not even have to know the affected employee as the mere framing of the case (e.g. a subjective report of the corresponding executive regarding the affected employee) might already influence the decision of the professional (Petrinovich & O’Neill, 1996; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981).

The high ratings of the topic “Contradicting/Inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values” indicate another relevant moral challenge. How should one weigh contradicting official guidelines? Is one official guideline more important than the other official guideline? What if the official guidelines clearly suggest a line of action that is contradicted by own beliefs? All of these questions might frequently arise within the function

of a human resource professional at the Dutch Ministry of Defence, which again emphasize the complexity of the function and also the imperfect official guidelines of the Ministry.

Also the hierarchical pressure at the Ministry of Defence seems to challenge the moral decision making process of human resource professionals. Almost 20% of all stated cases of moral dilemmas were about executives who wanted something from the human resource professionals that contradicted with the official guidelines. This stresses the morally challenging function of the professionals who in any case have to hurt either the official guidelines or the interests/orders of the executive. This kind of moral dilemmas were rated in 83% of the cases as rather personal which indicates that in the majority of the “hierarchical pressure” cases a more affect-laden processing route might be activated (Pellizzoni et al., 2009). Consequently, human resource professionals might neglect important arguments due to the high degree of personal involvement.

In addition, the mere access to sensitive data already involves the risk to abuse it for own purpose or for the purpose of others (e.g. friends). 49% of the reported cases were rated as rather personal what once again might decrease the probability of cognitive processing and makes it more likely to weigh the arguments less objective (Pellizzoni et al., 2009). Finally, the scope of responsibility of the human resource professionals seems to be defined vaguely. According to an official guideline, the human resource professionals are entitled to give advice, asked and unasked. Especially the unasked dimension might result in moral dilemmas since some professionals might critically ponder if it was morally right to give/give not advice in certain situations.

The results of the data analysis show that human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence experience various moral dilemmas. This result goes together with the study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (1998), that was quoted by Schumann (2001) and found that 54% of the participated human resource professionals

already experienced misconduct, abuse or violation of the law and/or the ethical standards of the involved organizations. The recent study gives insight into the different topics of moral dilemmas that human resource professionals experience at the Dutch Ministry of Defence, the degree of personal involvement in the different topics and the arguments that were used/stated in order to support the different incompatible options of their moral dilemmas. This already leads directly to one of the strengths of the recent research.

### **Strengths:**

The high ecological validity of the current research was among other things generated by the high homogeneity of the participants. Each of the approximately 513 participants were employed as human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Therefore, it is likely that a broad spectrum of different moral dilemmas at the Dutch Ministry of Defence was identified and that the explored cases were close to reality. Another strong point was the high inter-rater reliability in terms of categorizing the moral dilemmas ( $K = 0.71$ ) and determining the degree of personal involvement ( $K = 0.72$ ) (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Next to this, the coding process regarding the degree of personal involvement was a matter of interpretation, even though personal cases were reduced to cases that involve interpersonal conflicts – otherwise almost any of the cases could be determined as personal. In fact, the high degree of interpretation during the coding process was also the main reason to engage more than one or two raters, which is a relevant strength of the recent research.

Furthermore, in this study, the total sum/frequency ratings regarding the different topics (sub codes A1-A7) and the degree of personal involvement (sub codes B1/B2) were calculated by summing the ratings (of all three raters) of all cases per sub code. This method had the advantage that the ratings of all raters were included and that the complexity of the moral dilemmas was taken into account by including the coding/interpretation of several persons.

**Limitations:**

However, there are also some limitations with regard to the present research. A first weakness is related to the data gathering method. During the moral decision making training, the coaches did their best to create a trustful and confident atmosphere. Still, the human resource professionals spoke about their dilemmas in the presence of colleagues and sometimes also supervisors. It is possible that, some cases were too sensitive to be discussed with colleagues/executives that were potentially affected by that same case. This might also explain why some of the topics like “organizational interest vs individual interest” were more often stated and discussed compared to possibly more sensitive topics like “impartiality”.

Another weakness concerns the narrative nature of the current study as it was based on transcripts of the training sessions. As such, an essential part of the research was highly dependent on the way the different trainers reported on training sessions. Indeed, there were great differences in the way and the quality of the recorded transcripts. For instance, some trainers recorded certain cases highly detailed while others did not even write complete sentences. Beside this, especially the categorization in terms of different topics of the moral dilemmas was dependent on the degree of elaboration within cases. In fact, a great amount of the moral dilemmas was very complex and therefore, it was difficult to reduce the whole dilemma to one core topic. Especially this process depended heavily on the elaboration of the cases in the recorded transcripts.

The complexity of the moral dilemmas was also a challenge during the coding process. It was instructed that the raters had to choose one topic only per moral dilemma during the categorization of the cases. The ulterior motive was that this method would lead to a better overview of the core dilemmas and more distinctive results, since many moral dilemmas were highly complex and some of the sub codes related to the different topics seemed to overlap in certain cases. The more distinctive results were expected to be more



useful in order to identify trends among the topics. Due to this, the coding process regarding the different topics was a matter of interpretation, as each rater had to choose only one sub code per case. This method was possibly not ideal to meet the challenge of highly complex moral dilemmas. An alternative method would be to allow the raters to decide per sub code if it is applicable on the case or not instead of forcing them to choose only one sub code per case. By this, the amount of ratings per sub code would be possibly more accurate as this method might give a more complete and accurate picture of the complexity of the moral dilemmas.

Another discussable topic was the coding process regarding the deontological and teleological arguments that was executed differently than initially planned. Due to the great majority of transcripts, the arguments were already labelled regarding deontological or teleological. Actually, the raters adhered to these labels as they did not have enough insight and information about the arguments to decide differently than the group of human resource professionals did. Also the coding of the arguments with regard to certain argument types (C1-C9) was problematic as the transcripts were often insufficient to determine the exact type of argument and the raters had not enough insight in the official organizational guidelines. Therefore, the stated deontological and teleological arguments were simply counted. The result of this counting shows which arguments were stated the most per topic of the moral dilemmas. However, the relevance and ecological validity of certain arguments is doubtful as one cannot ensure that a human resource professional during a real life scenario considers all arguments that were considered during this research as a group. Additionally, the amount of cases that was recorded with arguments was low regarding certain topics.

A last limitation has to do with the external validity/population validity of the research. The findings of this research might be highly valid for the human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. However, they cannot be simply generalized

to human resource professionals in other organizations as too many factors differ from organization to organization such as the organizational culture, the official guidelines, the concrete tasks and the education of the professionals. Still, some of the explored moral dilemmas are most likely also relevant for other organizations.

### **Practical implications:**

Actually, there are many possible practical implications for this research. A possibility would be to scrutinize official guidelines of the Dutch Ministry of Defence that contradict frequently with other guidelines or laws (e.g. some of the official guidelines for human resource professionals or the “good employers” guideline). Possibly, some of these guidelines could be adjusted in terms of expanding, specifying or loosening. For example, the “good employers official guideline” could be defined more precisely, so that it becomes clearer what kind of “employee friendly” behaviour is meant/included by the guideline and in which situation it is (not) practicable. Also new necessary official guidelines could be created and implemented based on the analysed moral dilemmas. Another possibility might be to introduce a hierarchy that prescribes which official guidelines are more important in certain cases than other contradicting official guidelines. Furthermore, moral decision making trainings could be improved by for example accentuating and discussing the degree of personal involvement and the role of moral balancing and moral consistency in certain highly relevant real life cases/scenarios and the corresponding effects. In addition, a change in the organizational culture could be taken into consideration as “hierarchical pressure” seems to burden many human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence on a frequent basis. This kind of organizational change could include for example the implementation of a flatter hierarchy (in the organizational setting), in which executives “force” less and in which they are more aware of moral dilemmas (of the employees) that they possibly cause. Furthermore, it might be possible to resolve problems related to the abuse of the access to sensitive information –

especially regarding the access to the data base. If the access would be recorded digitally and subsequently controlled and evaluated, human resource professionals might be less prone to abuse their access. However, this kind of digitally recording has to be implemented carefully as some human resource professionals might associate this kind of recording with distrust.

### **Further research:**

There are also several options for further research. As a high amount of research regarding moral dilemmas is based on theoretical moral dilemmas nowadays, more practical and ecological valid dilemmas can be used based on this research. It would be interesting to see if the found neurological evidence for the distinction of personal and impersonal decision making (Greene et al., 2001) could be replicated by using personal moral dilemmas of human resource professionals that were found in the current research. Same goes for the principles of moral balancing and moral consistency (Cornelissen et al., 2013). Also in this case, it would be interesting to research if the found effects are reproducible by using real life scenarios and corresponding day-to-day deontological and teleological arguments. Of course, another logical step could be to research moral dilemmas of human resource professionals at other organizations and compare the findings with the results of this study. Also, other methods of data gathering might be used in further research in order to get more reliable and valid results – especially regarding the different topics of moral dilemmas and the corresponding proportions. For example, instead of using transcripts of group discussions, one might also use narratives of human resource professionals that were interviewed individually, as this kind of interviews might enhance the personal reflexivity and therefore the validity of the narratives (Caetano, 2015). This method might also enhance the validity of the analysed arguments as it might become more clear which of the stated arguments are really important.

Summarized, one can say that there is a broad variety of different opportunities for further research and practical implications. However, this research was just a first explorative

step to get more insight in the moral dilemmas of one of the most relevant target groups – human resource professionals. Highly relevant topics of moral dilemmas (for instance: “Organizational interests vs. individual interest”; “Contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values” or “Hierarchical pressure”) of human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence were found with corresponding impersonal/personal ratings and corresponding deontological and teleological arguments. As such, a first step was taken to explore the content and the context of morally challenging situations (moral dilemmas) that human resource professionals experience at the Dutch Ministry of Defence.

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## **Appendix:**

### **Appendix A: Coding guide**

Coding scheme – Sven Pacholke – Moral dilemmas of human resource professionals

#### **Instructions:**

With the help of the following coding scheme, the cases regarding moral dilemmas of the human resource professionals at the Dutch Ministry of Defence can be analysed in terms of the topic of the given dilemma (code A), the degree of personal involvement (code B), the arguments (code C) and if the arguments are teleological or deontological (code D). For each case/argument, one has to decide which of the corresponding sub codes (A1, A2...B1, B2...) are the most applicable. If more than one sub code seems to be applicable per case/argument, one only has to choose the sub code that seems to be the most applicable (thus, per case/argument one can only choose a single sub code per coding category). If one made a decision, one has to mark/label the corresponding text as well as comment it with the applicable sub code. In general, the description of the case has to be commented with one of the sub codes A1-A7 as well as with one of the sub codes B1/B2. Each argument has to be commented with one of the sub codes C1-C9 plus one of the sub codes D1/D2/D3.

#### **Example:**

## Casus 1

### Korte omschrijving casus: situatie:

Voor een vacature van instructeur in de Eerste Vakopleiding is slechts een kandidaat, welke beschikbaar zou kunnen worden gemaakt aangezien hij MD-er is. Hij is echter behoorlijk dik van postuur, het geen we niet representatief vinden. Hij doet ook niet mee aan de fysieke testen, hij wil dat niet en gaat het ook niet halen vanwege zijn postuur. De studenten moeten dat wel (eis) Hij voldoet aan alle functievereisten voldoet en functioneert boven gemiddeld (daarom is hij ook MD-er). Er zijn geen andere beschikbare kandidaten. Aan mij (namens MD-commissie) wordt advies gevraagd, aangezien het om een bevordering naar een officiersrang betreft.

Stap 1: Voor welke beslissing sta ik?

Adviseer ik positief of negatief om deze functionaris beschikbaar te maken voor deze instructeursfunctie?

### Stap 2: Betrokkenen

De sollicitant, lijnmanager, leerlingen, korps Mariniers, P en O, ik, samenleving, dikke mensen, echtgenoot/thuisfront, concurrenten, opleidingsinstituut, CZSK, sportinstructeurs, Aansturingen regie, loopbaanbegeleiding, MD-commissie, functietoewijzer, andere MD-kandidaten, vakbond, bestuursrechter.

### Stap 3


Ik neem de beslissing


### Stap 4 (vragen + antwoorden)

- Is deze kandidaat beschikbaar? Niet formeel, maar MD-ers kunnen beschikbaar worden gemaakt
- Enige kandidaat? Ja, andere, representatief betere kandidaten, zijn niet beschikbaar
- Voldoen aan alle functievereisten
- Ooit door organisatie wat van zijn postuur gezegd? Nee
- Jaarlijkse sporttest? Doet hij niet, maar nooit formeel op aangesproken. Zou hij nooit kunnen halen.
- Zit er een bevordering aan vast? Ja
- 
- 


### Stap 5: [vraag, zie stap 1]

Argumenten voor de handeling adviseer ik positief	Argumenten voor het sterkste alternatief adviseer ik negatief
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hij voldoet aan de functie-eisen (rechtszekerheid)</li> <li>• Hij is de enige kandidaat</li> <li>• Vacature moet gevuld worden (organisatiebelang)</li> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Lijn kan zelf oordelen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hij heeft zijn MBV niet gehaald</li> <li>• Hij heeft geen DCP</li> <li>• Het is geen functieprofiel</li> <li>• Hij is niet beschikbaar</li> <li>• Hij is niet de enige kandidaat</li> <li>• Goudkoorts</li> <li>• Het ondermiint gezag als instructeur</li> </ul>

 **Sven Pacholke**  
A3; B2

 **Sven Pacholke**  
C1; D1

 **Sven Pacholke**  
C2

 **Sven Pacholke**  
C3; D1

 **Sven Pacholke**  
C8



Code	Type	Explanation
A	Topic of dilemma	The ethical dilemmas can be categorized in terms of different topics
A1	Entitlement to get advice	<p>Human resource professionals give advice to different stakeholders. Therefore, sometimes the question arises which stakeholder has “the most” right/entitlement to get advice – especially if the interests of the different stakeholders differ.</p> <p>(for example: “<i>Medewerker heeft zijn opleiding voltooid maar wil graag de dienst verlaten (Werk past niet bij hem, heeft zich vergist). De leiding wil hem niet laten gaan. Adviseer ik om hem niet aan zijn dienstverplichting te houden om ontslag te provoceren?</i>”)</p>
A2	Insights/knowledge about sensitive data	Human resource professionals have insight into sensitive data/information of the employees (by using the IT systems, by confidential talks etc.) and sensitive processes – e.g. application processes. They have to handle these data carefully and as such the question arises when it is allowed to look for/share these sensitive data/information.

		<p>(for example: “Tijdens een vertrouwelijk gesprek deelt een medewerker mee dat hij in medische procedure zit (wil deze informatie verder met niemand delen). De lijnmanager van deze medewerker wil functioneringstraject voor de betrokkene medewerker omdat hij niet meer goed functioneert. Deel ik de vertrouwelijke informatie (medische procedure) met de lijnmanager om het slecht functioneren van de medewerker uit te leggen? ”)</p>
A3	Contradicting/inappropriate official guidelines vs. own beliefs/values	<p>Official guidelines, the law, the code of practice and own beliefs/values can contradict with each other because of various reasons such as inappropriateness, overlapping and incompatibleness. The human resource professionals have to weigh all these factors.</p> <p>(for example: “Medewerker verliest baan medio 2015 door reorganisatie. Het is een militair die nog geen 2 jaar op functie zit en pas beschikbaar komt voor nieuwe functie in maart 2016. In zijn thuissituatie is hij mantelzorger daarom wil hij graag dicht bij huis werken. Er is een vacature die hem past per 1 december 2015. Zijn huidige baas wil meewerken. Er zijn nog geen andere belangstellenden. Het is tegen de regelgeving om hem binnen 2 jaar een andere functie te geven. Toch kan het</p>

		<i>moreel juist zijn om van deze regel af te wijken vanwege goed werkgeverschap (zorg voor je medewerkers).")</i>
A4	Scope of responsibility	<p>Where does the responsibility of the human resource professional start and where does it end? Human resource professionals may (or do not) feel responsible for certain cases even though they are not (or they are) responsible.</p> <p>Which tasks lie within the area of responsibility of the human resource professional?</p> <p>(for example: <i>"Je ontdekt dat een re-integratieregeling niet goed wordt toegepast. Er is een fout gemaakt. Er zijn toezeggingen gedaan en iedereen is tevreden met de huidige situatie. Ga ik daar actief in optreden of laat ik het zo."</i>)</p>
A5	Hierarchical pressure	<p>Executives can ask human resource professionals to do something that is against the official guidelines. Does the human resource professional execute the order or does he/she act according to the official guidelines?</p> <p>(for example: <i>"Ik word door mijn leidinggevende en de commandant gedwongen om een verplaatsing van drie medewerkers naar een nieuwe functie te regelen. Probleem is echter dat geheel tegen de afspraken in die nieuwe functies niet vacant zijn verklaard. Hierdoor kunnen andere geïnteresseerden zich niet presenteren voor de nieuwe functie. Er is dus geen normale</i></p>

		<i>selectieprocedure gevolgd. Nadat ik heb aangegeven dat dit zo niet kan wordt er gedreigd dat ik op het matje moet komen als ik een dienstopdracht weiger. Wat te doen.”)</i>
A6	Organizational interest vs. individual interest	<p>Organizational interests and individual interests (e.g. interests of the employees) can contradict. In these cases, the human resource professional has to weigh the different interests.</p> <p>(for example: ”Je bent voorzitter van een commissie. Onderzoek m.b.t. diefstal – betrokkene medewerker al oud en lang bij defensie. Spullen (eigendom van defensie) zijn thuis bij de betrokkene medewerker gevonden maar alleen sommige met leenbonnen. De vrouw van de medewerker heeft de spullen tijdens een dienstreis uit de dienstauto geladen (→ daarom spullen vergeten terug te geven – volgens medewerker). Adviseer ik voor ontslag of niet?”)</p>
A7	Impartiality	<p>Human resource professionals have to be impartial and neutral. However, in many cases they know the different stakeholders personally (e.g. the direct executive, a colleague, a certain employee) and therefore it becomes more complicated to act impartial/neutral.</p> <p>(for example: “Vriend vraagt voor tips en extra training voor een sollicitatie bij defensie. Doe ik dat voor hem?”)</p>

B	Impersonal (less personal) vs. personal (more personal)	The ethical dilemmas can be divided into either rather impersonal or rather personal.
B1	Impersonal	<p>The case does not include the component of a direct interpersonal conflict with someone else.</p> <p>(for example: <i>“Medewerker verliest baan medio 2015 door reorganisatie. Het is een militair die nog geen 2 jaar op functie zit en pas beschikbaar komt voor nieuwe functie in maart 2016. In zijn thuissituatie is hij mantelzorger daarom wil hij graag dicht bij huis werken. Er is een vacature die hem past per 1 december 2015. Zijn huidige baas wil meewerken. Er zijn nog geen andere belangstellenden. Het is tegen de regelgeving om hem binnen 2 jaar een andere functie te geven. Toch kan het moreel juist zijn om van deze regel af te wijken vanwege goed werkgeverschap (zorg voor je medewerkers).”</i>)</p>
B2	Personal	<p>The case includes the component of a direct interpersonal conflict with someone else.</p> <p>(for example: <i>“Ik word door mijn leidinggevende en de commandant gedwongen om een verplaatsing van drie medewerkers naar een nieuwe functie te regelen. Probleem is echter dat geheel tegen de afspraken in die nieuwe functies niet vacant zijn verklaard. Hierdoor kunnen andere geïnteresseerden zich niet presenteren voor</i></p>

		<i>de nieuwe functie. Er is dus geen normale selectieprocedure gevolgd. Nadat ik heb aangegeven dat dit zo niet kan wordt er gedreigd dat ik op het matje moet komen als ik een dienstopdracht weiger. Wat te doen.”)</i>
C	Type of argument	The named arguments can be categorized in terms of different types/topics.
C1	Human resource official guidelines	If the argument is related to an official guideline for human resource professionals.  (for example: “volgens P&O procedure werken.”)
C2	Law	If the argument is related to jurisdiction/law.  (for example cases of theft, drunk driving etc.)
C3	Code of practice – Ministry of Defence	If the argument is related to the code of practice of the Ministry of Defence.  (for example: “order is order”)
C4	Consequences for the corresponding human resource professional + relatives	If the argument is related to consequences for the corresponding human resource professional and/or relatives.  (for example cases where the job of the human resource professional is threatened)

C5	Consequences for the human resource department	If the argument is related to consequences for the human resource department.  (for example: “voorkomen imagoschade P&O afdeling.”)
C6	Consequences for the Ministry of Defence	If the argument is related to consequences for the Ministry of Defence.  (for example: “voorkomen imagoschade ministerie van defensie.”)
C7	Consequences for the corresponding executive + relatives	If the argument is related to consequences for the corresponding executive and/or relatives.  (for example if the reputation of the executive would suffer.)
C8	Consequences for the corresponding employee(s) + relatives	If the argument is related to consequences for the corresponding employee(s) and/or relatives.  (for example if the corresponding employee would lose his/her job.)
C9	Other	For example, if the argument is rather considered as a fact.
D	Type of argument:  Deontological vs.  teleological	The arguments used by the human resource professionals can be divided into deontological or teleological

D1	Deontological (Categorical imperative)	Acting in accordance to organizational guidelines/law/code of practice (for example: “ <i>volgens P&amp;O procedure werken</i> ”)
D2	Teleological (Utilitarianism)	Acting in accordance to the biggest net benefits for the affected majority of stakeholders – thus weighing of the consequences (for example: “financiële consequenties in het geval van ontslag/niet ontslag”)
D3	Other	For example, if the argument is rather considered as a fact (no guideline nor consequence).