

# Moral Music Management: Ethical Decision-Making After Avicii

Research Article

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**Abstract:** Following the tragic suicide of Avicii (Tim Bergling) in 2018, many in the popular media, and reportedly the musician's own family, were seen to question the ethics of decisions taken by his manager (Williams, 2018; Ralston, 2018). By applying a moral intensity test (Jones, 1991) in the form of a scenario-based questionnaire to six music managers based in London (UK), this article interrogates how and why music managers make the moral and ethical choices they do. The findings suggest that music managers are aware of ethical challenges emanating from their work, but that the relatively informal, loosely regulated nature of the music workplace complicates the negotiation of ethical and moral tensions. However, music managers' close awareness of the 'social consensus' and 'proximity' of moral intensity suggests that cultural (as opposed to regulatory) change can help guide and inform managerial decision-making.

**Keywords:** *moral • ethics • music management • mental health • music industries*

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship between a musician and their manager is one of the most central and crucial aspects in their careers. Music managers<sup>1</sup> are everything from a planner and strategist to a form of guidance and a friend. The involvement needed to get to know the musician and devise specific plans to steer their career in the right direction, as well as ensuring that everyone in the surrounding team is dedicated to the career success of the musician, is exhaustive (Bilton and Leary, 2002; Frascogna and Hetherington, 2004). Managers can be a form of 'protection' for musicians against major labels and publishers as well as someone to oversee business matters and extend the longevity of the musician's career (Jones, 2012). The role can be extremely varied in how much or how little the manager chooses to handle for the musician, and this makes each musician–manager relationship '*unique and personal*' (Anderton et al., 2013: 185). It is a role rooted in the management of risk, uncertainty and predicated on 'agility' (see Morrow, 2018 for perhaps the most detailed academic conceptualisation of the role).

At the same time, the role of the music manager is one that has been widely stereotyped and negatively depicted in the media (Anderton et al., 2013). Dannen (1991) almost 30 years ago described the music business as an industry (in)famous for unethical and abusive practices. Indeed, the exploitative aspects of some managerial contracts are still widely recollected in the profession (Williamson, 2016), although some have tried to challenge this image (Rogan, 1988; Morrow, 2006). Following the tragic death of Avicii (real name Tim Bergling) in 2018, many

1. We use the terminology 'music manager' in this article drawing on the phrasing employed by the Music Manager's Forum (MMF) and the European Music Managers Alliance (EMMA). As UK Music (2019) state, "*Music Managers exist to represent Music Makers – e.g. Artists, Bands, Producers, Songwriters and nurture their business and creative interests. Managers can be considered the Chief Operating Officer of the Artists global business*". This is analogous to other definitions such as 'artist manager' (Morrow, 2006, 2013, 2018) but is distinct from broader definitions of music management, which might include the management of 'music' on behalf of a label or publisher, and so on.

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in the popular media, and indeed reportedly Avicii's own family, were seen to ask questions vis-à-vis the role and responsibilities of music managers to protect the mental and physical health of musicians (Williams, 2018; Ralston, 2018)<sup>2</sup>, and questions around the potentially exploitative nature of their contractual arrangements had been present in the case of Avicii's manager for several years prior (Stoney Roads, 2014). Some media portrayals—notably the documentary entitled *'Avicii: True Stories'* (Musgrave, 2020)—appeared to take a dim view of Avicii's manager Arash Pournouri who was suggested by some to have over-worked the artist and not taken care of his well-being. Indeed, this debate regarding managerial ethics and responsibility has been driven, at least in part, by research into the relationship between the working conditions of the music industry and high levels of anxiety and depression among musicians (Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020). In the wake of this tragedy, what do we really understand about the decision-making practices of music managers, and how and why they make the choices they do for their artists? Is there such a thing as the morality of music management?

There is a small body of academic literature interrogating the regulation of music management from a legal perspective (Hertz, 1988; Gilenson, 1990; O'Brien, 1992), but rather less considering this from an ethical or moral perspective. The work of Morrow (2013, 2018) has been a notable exception in this field, exploring what he has described, drawing on the work of Gino and Ariely (2012), as *'moral flexibility'* (ibid, 2018: 95), which he suggests is part of music management. By this, he refers to the ability to justify potentially illegal, or at least unethical decisions, within a working environment which is largely free of formal regulation, and within which personal traits such as creative decision-making and openness can be seen to correlate with dishonesty. As Gino and Ariely (2012: 455) note, *"We are often surprised to learn that successful and ingenious decision makers in these [other] contexts have crossed ethical boundaries"*. Reconceptualising this, Morrow (2018: 95) suggests that *"divergent thinking and openness positively correlate with moral flexibility, and therefore creativity promotes dishonesty by increasing one's ability to self-justify bad deeds"*.

Music managers of course do not always behave dishonestly. Many are highly professional, dedicated to their artists, passionate about their work and heavily invested both emotionally and financially in their artists' careers. There are many books written about 'how to be' a music manager (Allen, 2018; Weiss and Gaffney, 2012); however, there are a few academic studies that have sought to interrogate how and why music managers make the decisions that they do taking moral or ethical decision-making as their central focus (see the work of Hughes et.al (2014) on 'duty of care' for one of the few examples). In the wake of the death of Avicii, and in the context of the debates engendered by the literature outlined above on the nature of the musician–manager relationship, this article will seek to ask what constitutes ethical decision-making for music managers and what ethical guidelines or structures do they use when making their decisions? For instance, how do music managers weigh economic concerns of profitability (which for Fassin (2005) can drive non-ethical behaviour), against concerns for emotional and physical well-being? This was a tension viscerally illustrated following the death of Avicii, for example, when it was seen that his manager had facilitated bookings of more than 200 shows per year, playing several times a week, sometimes in two different cities on the same night (Ralston, 2018). With Bergling's annual earnings exceeding \$20 million (£15 m), what constituted a moral or ethical choice here, and indeed ethical for whom? By engaging with these questions, it is hoped that this study can contribute towards the literature examining the musician–manager relationship as well as encourage debate within the professional music industries about best practices for managers, notably in the aforementioned context of what has been described as 'the mental health crisis' (Dhillon, 2018) in the music industry among musicians.

## 2. What is Ethical Decision-Making?

The literature on corporate ethics from organisational and management studies has produced some of the most valuable models of ethical decision-making. This literature has also been helpful in providing key definitions, which will be adopted in this article. First, this article will adopt the definition of a 'moral issue' by Velasquez and Rostankowski (1985) cited in Jones (1991: 367): *"[A] moral issue is present where a person's actions, when freely*

2. This idea of what kind of 'duty of care' music managers have (or should have) has echoed debates from years earlier around the duty of care record companies have (or should have) following the death of Amy Winehouse (Lindvall, 2011).

performed, may harm or benefit others". Second, we will adopt the definition of 'moral agent' used by Jones (ibid) as: "[A] moral agent is a person who makes a moral decision, even though he or she may not recognise that moral issues are at stake". Finally, we will adopt the definition of an 'ethical decision', also by Jones (ibid) as being: "[A] decision that is both legal and morally acceptable to the larger community". The question is; when faced with a moral issue, how does a moral agent make an ethical decision?

In seeking to ascertain this, Rest (1986) proposed a four-stage model whereby agents must do the following: first, they recognise the existence of a moral issue that requires their deliberation; second, the reaching of a moral judgement following that period of deliberation; third, deciding upon the most appropriate course of action (what is called 'moral intent') and finally, implementing the decided upon moral behaviour. In response to this, and building on a range of ethical decision-making models from the field of marketing (including Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Trevino, 1986 and Dubinsky and Loken, 1989), work on 'Moral Intensity' by Jones (1991) suggested that the first stage of Rest's model—the recognition of the moral issue—was central. People must first recognise a moral issue before anything else takes place. Drawing on arguments from moral philosophy regarding moral responsibility based on proportionality (Wirtenberger, 1962), Jones' model focussed on how moral agents make sense of moral issues, as opposed to earlier models which focussed only on the agents themselves, to suggest that "every ethical issue can be represented in terms of its moral intensity" (Jones, 1991: 374), which is comprised of six components. Moral agent's awareness of these components of moral intensity would, therefore, inform their decision-making. These factors (taken from Jones, 1991: 374-377) are:

1. *Magnitude of consequences*: The sum of the harms (or benefit) done to victims (or beneficiaries) of the moral act in question.
2. *Social consensus*: The degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil or good.
3. *Probability of effect*: The joint function of the probability that the act in question will actually take place and the act in question will actually cause the harm or benefit predicted.
4. *Temporal immediacy*: The length of time between the present and the onset of consequences of the moral act in question.
5. *Proximity*: The feeling of nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical) of the act in question.
6. *Concentration of effect*: The inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of given magnitude.

The intention of this model was to identify components of ethical decision-making and behaviour, and that further empirical research was required to specify the relationship between the moral intensity constructs and adopted behaviours. Consequently, over the following decades, researchers have employed this model as the basis of ethical decision-making (Robin, Reidenbach and Forrest, 1996; Singhapakdi, Vitell and Kraft, 1996; Chia and Mee, 2000; Karacaer, et al., 2009). However, despite the increase in interest in corporate ethics and the application of ethical decision-making models in many industries, with reference to the music industries, ethical matters have tended to focus on issues of legal representation (Krasilovsky and Meloni, 1990), conflicts of interest vis-à-vis contractual relationships (Gilenson, 1990) or the ethics of music piracy (Shang, Chen and Chen, 2008; Coyle et al., 2009). No empirical investigation has been conducted concerning ethical decision-making processes employed by music managers in their daily professional lives, and certainly not one employing the moral intensity framework. In the wake of the death of Avicii, it is crucial that this question is confronted. Therefore, this article will employ Jones' (1991) methodological approach to engage with the following research question: How do music managers identify ethical issues and make moral choices?

### 3. Methodology: A Moral Intensity Test

Data were collected through a scenario-based questionnaire—an approach commonly used as a research instrument in business ethics studies focussed on examining ethical judgements and intentions (Singhapakdi and Vitell, 1990; Banerjee, Cronan and Jones, 1998). According to Alexander and Becker (1978), the use of scenarios helps to standardise social stimulation across participants, making the decision-making situation more 'real'. Three scenarios were developed, and an action was proposed. Scenario C was included as a 'neutral' premise to determine whether participants would differentiate moral intensity across the scenarios.

**Scenario 1:**

Manager A is currently managing an artist, an electropop one-man-act who is drawing the attention of several big record labels. He is finishing his successful European tour after almost 10 weeks, performing 3 or even 4 times a week. The artist has suggested that he needs a break due to the high intensity of the tour (that often involves social events and heavy drinking). However, the manager is contacted by a prestigious agent who wants to book the act for a large amount of money. This could be very beneficial for the artists' career both financially and in terms of raising his emerging profile, but could extend the tour.

**Action:** Manager A accepts the agent's deal before asking the artist.

**Scenario 2:**

Manager B is in charge of an artist known for his eccentricities, politically incorrect lyrics, scandals, and sometimes substance abuse. Despite this, the artist is at the top of his career, headlining festivals, winning all kinds of awards, and gaining more and more fans. Financially speaking, this is the greatest moment manager B has ever had. Although the manager is aware of the artist's substance abuse, he has never done anything about it, letting the artist 'be himself'. However, just before starting an important tour, the manager realises the artist's wife has bruises on her face. When speaking with her, she tells the manager they had a domestic fight two days ago, but she was too scared to say something about it due to the fame of the artist and the upcoming tour.

**Action:** Manager B calms the artist's wife and tells her they will talk about it after the tour.

**Scenario 3:**

Manager C has noticed for the last few months that the drummer of the band he is managing has failed to reach the standards the band is looking for. The lack of enthusiasm and commitment is affecting the rehearsals, the band's co-existence, and their live performances. Because of this, they have lost several opportunities to play again in important venues. Manager C has spoken to the drummer and the band before; however, he has shown no sign of improvement.

**Action:** Manager C decided to dismiss the drummer.

These scenarios and actions were presented to six music managers based in London (UK) drawn from our professional network and through introductions generously made by a former senior figure of a music managers' organisation. After considering the scenarios, participants completed a questionnaire of eight statements with Likert-type scales for responses adapted from prior research by Singhapakdi, Vitell and Kraft (1996). Statements 1 and 2 were devised to measure ethical perception and ethical intention, respectively, while statements 3–8 were devised to measure dimensions of moral intensity (Jones, 1991) where a single statement was adapted to measure each component as per earlier research by Singer (1996). These statements were:

1. 'The situation above involves an ethical problem'. High scores would indicate relatively high levels of moral recognition and ethical perception.
2. 'I would act in the same manner as the manager did in the above scenario'. Agreement with the manager's depicted action indicates less ethical intention than disagreement does, meaning that respondents' ethical intentions are 'less ethical' when they agree.
3. 'The overall harm (if any) done as a result of the manager's action would be very small'—to measure Magnitude of Consequences (Jones, 1991)
4. 'Most people would agree that the manager's action is wrong'—to measure Social Consensus (ibid)
5. 'There is a very small likelihood that the manager's action will actually cause any harm'—to measure Probability of Effect (ibid)
6. 'The manager's actions will not cause any harm in the immediate future'—to measure temporal immediacy (ibid)
7. 'If the artist is a personal friend of the manager, the action is wrong'—to measure proximity (ibid)
8. 'The manager's actions will harm very few people (if any)'—to measure Concentration of Effect (ibid). Higher scores on questions 3–8 would imply a scenario that was understood to be more 'morally intense' than the others.

Following this, in the second section of the task, managers were asked a series of open questions regarding the scenarios as well as about their thoughts and feelings during the decision-making process. To maintain consistency among participants, the same questions were asked of all respondents but room for space and flexibility in a semi-structured construct was afforded—an approach consistent with the Moral Judgement Interview procedure (Elm and Weber, 1994). These interviews were then coded for keywords to inform analysis using grounded theory to produce a series of qualitative findings.

<b>Variables</b>		<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	66.7
	Female	16.7
	Other	16.7
<b>Age</b>	20 to 29	50.0
	30 to 39	33.3
	40 and over	16.7
<b>Years of Experience</b>	Under 5	33.3
	5 to 9	16.7
	10 to 20	33.3
	20 and over	16.7
<b>Education Level</b>	Bachelor	16.7
	Master	66.7
	PhD	16.7
<b>Main Music Genre</b>	Rock	50.0
	Pop	16.7
	Electronic	16.7
	Other	17.0

**Figure 1.** Profile of respondents.

Of the six music managers who participated the mean age was 32 years old, ranging from 25 to 48 years old. Four identified as male, one as female, and one as non-binary. The average years of experience were 8.9 years, where the mean education level was a postgraduate degree. Half of the respondents suggested their main genre was rock music. Figure 1 above outlines the profile of the participants.

## 4. Findings

Each of the three moral intensity scenarios is explored in the following sections in turn and the analysis for each scenario is split into two components. The first quantitatively assesses the manager's scores in the moral intensity test. The findings suggest that music managers display ethical intention and therefore acknowledge and are aware of the ethical nature of their decision-making and seek to make ethical decisions. The second component is a qualitative examination of the findings from the interview section of the task. The findings suggest that music managers use two key devices—open and honest face-to-face conversations and an awareness of relationships—which act as the prisms through which they negotiate a series of moral and ethical tensions specific to the scenario in question.

## 4.1. Scenario 1

In the first scenario, a moral environment was devised whereby the ethical decision concerned the care of the musician. In this case, the music manager needed to weigh the consequences of accepting (or not) an offer from an agent about an important opportunity to continue a tour for a few more weeks, with the possibility that the extension might affect the mental and/or physical health of his or her artist. This scenario was, at least in part, informed by debates regarding a music manager's 'duty of care' implicit in media discussions following the death of Avicii.

### 4.1.1. Questionnaire and moral intensity

The results of the questionnaire to explore ethical perception, ethical intention and the six components of moral intensity for the first scenario are given in Figure 2. For 'Ethical Perception', a higher mean indicates that the scenario is perceived to present a greater ethical problem. In this case, the 'Ethical Perception' mean ( $M = 6.17$ ) was higher than the neutral value of 4, indicating that music managers do recognise and acknowledge an ethical problem in this scenario. For 'Ethical Intention', a lower mean indicates a greater intention from the music managers to behave in a different (i.e., more ethical) manner than the actor in the scenario. The implication of these findings is that music managers are aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of their choices and take these decisions seriously. For the 'Moral Intensity' components taken from Jones (1991), higher mean scores ( $M$ ) indicate a higher level of moral intensity, and hence a greater identification by managers of an ethical issue.

The questions surrounding moral intensity help us to better understand the specific factors which inform music manager's decision-making. In this scenario, 'Proximity' ( $M = 3.33$ ) and 'Social Consensus' ( $M = 5.17$ ) were perceived to be of a greater magnitude of importance than the other four measures of moral intensity. This suggests that the music managers in this study felt that their friendship with the artist was a crucial consideration in informing their decision-making and that most important of all was the social consensus surrounding their decision-making i.e.,

<b>Scenario 1</b>	
<b>Ethical Perception</b>	<b>6.17</b>
<b>Ethical Intention</b>	<b>1.67</b>
<b>Intensity Components</b>	
Magnitude of Consequence	3.00
Social Consensus	5.17
Probability of Effect	3.00
Temporal Immediacy	2.83
Proximity	3.33
Concentration of Effect	2.67

**Figure 2.** Means for measures of intensity components.



what might be considered acceptable, normal or usual within their genre, culture or profession. Understood within the context of Rest's (1986), four-stage model of moral decision-making, this suggests that the music managers in this study (1) recognised the existence of a moral issue and (2) use Jones' (1991) concepts of proximity and social consensus when making a moral judgement. The next question is, how do they (3) understand ideas of 'moral intent' i.e., deciding what to do and finally (4) implement this behaviour?

#### 4.1.2. Interviews and negotiating decision-making

Five out of six of the managers interviewed made reference to the central role that 'a conversation' would play. Keywords coded here included *conversation*, *encourage*, *explanation*, *opportunity* and *discussion*. That is, when faced with what they perceive as a moral issue, the moral agent, in this case, would negotiate their decision-making interpersonally. Central to this process for interviewees was the understanding of the relationships involved. Here keywords coded included *friendship*, *relationships*, *bargain* and *trust*. Four of the six interviewees suggested that the quality of the relationship either with the agent or with the artist could affect the manager's decision-making process, reflecting the findings on 'Proximity' from the questionnaire component of the task. If the relationship with the agent was felt to be close, for example, managers said that the offer might be negotiated by postponing the start date of the booking, and in this way give the artist the break he or she needed due to the intensity of the tour. If this were not possible, interviewees emphasised the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the agent given that they considered an opportunity like this might come up again in the near future, especially if the artist is getting increasing attention in the popular media and wider music industries. In terms of the relationship with the musician, managers suggested that it would make the decision 'easier' in some respects if there was a friendship between them.

These two devices—open and honest conversations and an understanding of relationships—were the methods by which managers suggested that they would negotiate a series of key ethical and moral tensions. The first of these concerned the impact of their decision on what they referred to as 'quality'. Here, managers expressed their concern about the quality of the artist's performance if the tour were to continue without interruption. Even though interviewees understood that this was an important opportunity financially on the one hand, they expressed an awareness that if the artist needed a break but continued with the tour anyway there was a possibility that the quality of the performance might be impaired, on the other hand. This might lead both to possible damage to the artist's image and to the fan experience. This impact on quality was balanced against what the interviewees felt could be the impact on money. Here, the potential profit earned from the booking was weighed against the potential for a loss of earnings in the future if the artist struggled and was unable to perform live. Finally, two of the six interviewees suggested that they would use conversations and relationships to evaluate the tension between the career development of the musician weighed against the potential impact of the decision on the musician's mental health. This was framed by one manager in the context of 'sacrifice' and was not necessarily the most important concern among interviewees, but some respondents were certainly aware of it.

## 4.2. Scenario 2

The second scenario concerned an ethical dilemma wherein the unethical action was being taken by the musician themselves—an allegation of domestic violence—before an important tour is about to start. Here, the manager must weigh the consequences of continuing the tour or not given an action taken by the musician, which is suggested to be affecting others, and which may have legal repercussions.

#### 4.2.1. Questionnaire and moral intensity

Again, a high mean score for 'Ethical Perception' ( $M = 6.17$ ) indicates the recognition of an ethical problem among music managers in the same intensity as Scenario 1. This, again, suggests that managers are aware of and acknowledge the ethical and moral dimensions of their decision-making. In addition, an 'Ethical Intention' score of  $M = 2.67$  suggests that respondents, in general, disagreed with the proposed course of action—"*Manager B calms the artist's wife and tells her they will talk about it after the tour*". After all, the musician in question is being accused of committing a serious crime. However, the higher mean score than in Scenario 1 ( $M = 1.67$ ) suggests that there was less consensus among respondents.

As per the previous scenario, Proximity ( $M = 4.50$ ) and Social Consensus ( $M = 4.83$ ) were perceived to be of the greatest magnitude of importance compared to the other four dimensions in assessing moral intensity. 'Proximity'

i.e., the strength of the relationships between the parties, was considered even more important in informing decision-making than it was in the first scenario. Again, a high score for 'Social Consensus' suggests that the social context within which the decision takes place is crucial for music managers, and that their decision in this scenario would be greatly informed by the ethical and moral norms of their genre, culture and/or profession.

#### 4.2.2. Interviews and negotiating decision-making

As per Scenario 1, the role of conversations and the strength of relationships were key tools for managers in negotiating ethical tensions, reflecting the findings from the questionnaire component of the study. Managers expressed that they would start a conversation either with the musician or with their wife to understand the situation, in which factors such as the recurrence of the act or the possibility for it to happen again would affect the decision of whether or not to continue with the tour. Some respondents suggested that the closeness of the relationship with the artist could be a complicating factor insofar as it might blur boundaries between being a 'manager' and being a 'friend', problematising issues of professionalism. It was suggested that decision-making would be different depending on the kind of relationship with the wife too, suggesting that if the manager did not know the wife particularly well they might be more likely to 'let things pass' until after the tour. If this were not the case, it was suggested that action would be immediate.

As per Scenario 1, precisely what the nature of the 'moral action' (Rest, 1986) would be was dependent upon the negotiation of a series of tensions. One of these has already been seen—the tension between being a manager and being a friend. A second key tension concerned what was described as 'personal values'—in this case feeling strongly about domestic violence being morally wrong—clashing with a desire to keep working and further both the manager's own career but also crucially to protect the musician too. Another key concern was the role that the press might play. This was expressed by four of the six interviewees. On the one hand, these music managers suggested that they would try to deal with the situation as far as possible away from the press and media to protect both their career and their artist even if the action was not morally 'right'. On the other hand, the involvement of the media (or social media) was complicated by personal values held by the manager that the action was wrong.

<b>Scenario 2</b>	
<b>Ethical Perception</b>	<b>6.17</b>
<b>Ethical Intention</b>	<b>2.67</b>
<b>Intensity Components</b>	
Magnitude of Consequence	2.33
Social Consensus	4.83
Probability of Effect	2.33
Temporal Immediacy	2.00
Proximity	4.50
Concentration of Effect	1.83

**Figure 3.** Means for measures of intensity components.



A final tension explored by managers was the weighing up of whether the tour the artist was about to embark on was local and therefore less important or international and therefore crucial. Respondents weighed this against the illegality of the action. It was suggested that if the tour was extremely important to the musician's career this could potentially override concerns held regarding the potential illegality of the accused action, supporting ideas from Morrow (2018) regarding 'moral flexibility' among music managers.

### 4.3. Scenario 3

In this scenario, respondents were asked to confront a decision regarding whether or not to dismiss the drummer of a band that was not accomplishing the minimum standards, and therefore affecting the band's live performance and future opportunities. This scenario was offered as a neutral scenario.

#### 4.3.1. Questionnaire and moral intensity

As anticipated, the result for 'Ethical Perception' in this third scenario ( $M = 2.17$ ) was significantly lower than the neutral value of 4 and compared to Scenarios 1 and 2, suggesting that the music managers interviewed acknowledged this scenario as less morally problematic than the others. Given this, the 'Ethical Intention' mean ( $M = 5.17$ ) was the highest across all scenarios, as agreeing with the behaviour of the hypothetical music manager in this scenario is not seen as unethical. The results of the three scenarios suggest that participants perceive moral intensity differently across scenarios, indicating that moral intensity is situation-specific. That is, components of moral intensity are recognised depending on the nature of the situation presented to the music managers, supporting Jones' (1991) and suggesting that music managers are aware of the morality and ethics of their decision-making.

Due to the nature of the decision contemplated in this scenario, and contrary to the previous two scenarios, 'Social Consensus' ( $M = 2.00$ ) and 'Proximity' ( $M = 2.67$ ) were the components with the lowest mean scores. In this case, managers expressed a higher level of agreement with the statements 'The manager's actions will harm very few people (if any)'—Concentration of Effect ( $M = 4.83$ ) - and 'There is a very small likelihood that the manager's action will actually cause any harm'—Probability of Effect ( $M = 4.67$ ).

<b>Scenario 3</b>	
<b>Ethical Perception</b>	<b>2.17</b>
<b>Ethical Intention</b>	<b>5.17</b>
<b>Intensity Components</b>	
Magnitude of Consequence	4.00
Social Consensus	2.00
Probability of Effect	4.67
Temporal Immediacy	3.83
Proximity	2.67
Concentration of Effect	4.83

**Figure 4.** Means for measures of intensity components.

### 4.3.2. Interviews and negotiating decision-making

As per the two previous scenarios, it was suggested that conversations were crucial in decision-making. It was suggested that managers would adopt what they called a 'Three Strikes Rule'. First, they would speak to the drummer to understand why he or she was not performing well and see if there was a way to help. Second, they would explain the consequences of his or her behaviour and warn them that if they do not improve, they might be dismissed. Third, the conversation would be with the band to discuss what to do with the drummer. They suggested that ultimately the music manager would not make the decision, but the band. Keywords coded were *conversation*, *consultation*, *opinion*, *explanation* and *feedback*. Again, it was suggested that the quality of the relationships within and between the manager and the band could change the decision-making process. In this case, a personal and closer relationship with the drummer would make the dismissal decision more difficult to make, and therefore, managers would try to find another solution.

## 5. Discussion

This small-scale study represents an attempt to assess how music managers engage in ethical decision-making across three hypothetical scenarios. Three general conclusions stand out which will inform the discussion below.

### 5.1. Ethical Acknowledgment: Weighing Consequences

First, music managers do acknowledge ethical problems evidenced in the mean scores for 'Ethical Perception' and seek to make ethical choices evidenced in the mean scores for 'Ethical Intention'. This lends some degree of support to writers such as Rogan (1988) and Morrow (2006) who have sought to combat negative conceptualisations of music managers. However, the extent to which the managers who participated in this small study are necessarily representative of music managers more generally is debatable. Certainly, those who took part had a high level of educational qualification, were relatively young (the majority being under 40 years old) and did not represent a broad genre base.

The managers in this study suggested that following the recognition of a moral issue, ethical decision-making was dependent upon the identification and negotiation of *tensions*. In other words, an ethical decision requires weighing the consequences of a tension identified to find a balance. Certainly, each scenario presented its own tensions. Scenario 1 highlighted a tension between the impact on quality clashing with an impact on money, and of career progression impacting on mental health. In Scenario 2, the challenge required the balancing of personal values versus career progression, and the importance of a tour against issues of legality. However, across all three scenarios, the tension between being a 'manager' and being a 'friend' was critical in how managers understood relationships and reached conclusions. This dynamic was in many respects the nexus through which decision-making was conversationally mediated and was seen as either being a help or a hindrance depending on the scenario. This closeness between the manager and the musician was, at times, thought to problematise issues of professionalism, and indeed it is this which stands out as the second key finding.

### 5.2. The Role of Conversations: The Non-Institutionalisation of Decision-making

As per the findings from the interview component of the study, music managers engage in a one-on-one conversation with their artist as a first step of the ethical decision-making process (what Rest (1986) would refer to as the deliberation of 'moral intent' and implementation of 'moral behaviour'). This behaviour suggests that ethical decision-making relies almost entirely on the subjective interaction between parties outside the parameters of a conventional workplace. That is, conversations can be seen as the source of non-institutionalised decision-making. This engendered a discussion in interviews vis-à-vis what constitutes professionalism and who is deciding what is and is not professional. It was striking that even though some of the music managers who took part in this study worked in management companies, none of them turned to formal company guidelines to support their processes, and none of them acknowledged any kind of institution such as the Music Managers Forum (MMF) for this same purpose.

Informality in decision-making is not necessarily a bad thing. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 88) suggest the creative industries tend to attract people who "*do not like rules*" and who value informality, which in turn allows relationships to thrive, permitting good ideas to flow. The music managers in this study privileged the lack of interference that comes with informality, and the proximity and richness of their relationships rooted in conversations to guide their decision-making. On the other hand, the fact that ethical, moral, and potentially even legal decisions

are understood as taking place outside of formal guidelines and structures in what is a professional sphere of activity, might for some be an understandable concern wherein the first impulse might be to regulate the field more. However, Morrow (2013) suggests that regulation of music managers can be detrimental to creative processes and innovation, and as per the work of Gross and Musgrave (2020), the extent to which formal regulation (outside of a manager's legal fiduciary duty) might be meaningful, helpful, warranted or even useful in the field of music management is debatable. As they suggest, "*when does protection become control?*" (ibid: 134). The difficulty in regulating the field of music management has been brought to public attention recently after the mother of rap artist Lil Peep (who died of an accidental drug overdose in 2017 at the age of 21) brought a negligence lawsuit against his management company First Access Entertainment. The company has defended the case by suggesting that: "*It would create a legal precedent requiring all entertainment companies and talent managers to act essentially as nannies for their artists, policing virtually all aspects of their personal lives... That result would be unrealistic, unworkable, and unreasonable*" (Womack vs. First Access Entertainment LLC, 2020: 15). This ongoing case is particularly interesting as organisations such as the MMF have sought to promote guidelines for ethical music management, and yet these were never referred to by the music managers in this study. The third finding of this study, therefore, is that shaping and guiding of the ethical decision-making practices of music managers are arguably not best achieved through a top-down approach based on regulation, but one based on cultural change.

### 5.3. 'Social Consensus' and Cultural Parameters

The moral intensity test completed by the managers who participated in this study suggested that ethical decision-making processes were greatly informed by two key dimensions of Jones' (1991) moral intensity framework. The first of these was 'Proximity' i.e., the nearness the person who makes a moral decision feels toward the target of the unethical act, and, crucially 'Social Consensus' i.e., the awareness of the acceptability or unacceptability of an act. The centrality of interpersonally mediated ethical negotiation i.e., the key role of conversations, and the high mean scores obtained for the 'Proximity' and 'Social Consensus' dimensions in the moral intensity test, are informing us that music manager's decision-making processes are taken within a cultural, political and environmental context—a context that music managers are acutely and keenly aware of. That is, the finding that managers articulate their moral intention within, and based on an awareness of, a social and cultural context, suggests that processes of cultural change, as opposed to formalised regulatory change, are likely to be powerful agents in guiding music manager's ethical choices.

What does this mean in practical terms vis-à-vis guiding managers and helping them make ethical choices? On an immediate level, ensuring that those of us who educate the next generation of music managers place issues, such as mental health and well-being, prominently within the design of our curriculum is a good starting point. This is particularly salient in the context of this paper as Chaparro was a student of Musgrave's at the University of Westminster and is now a music manager himself in Latin America. However, not all managers come through formal educational training, and therefore concepts like moral leadership which have been powerfully adopted in educational settings (Sergiovanni, 1992; Greenfield, 2004) and in business ethics (Gini, 1997), might be a potent source of influence i.e., older managers and respected figures in the wider music industries guiding the decisions of younger managers by the public example they set. Finally, as per the work of the managers in this study, conversations are key. It is hugely encouraging to note that the professional music industries have, in recent years, taken seriously a number of key ethical and moral challenges likely to be faced by managers in their professional lives from sexual harassment at live events (Hill et.al, 2019), to the representation of women (Bain, 2019), the challenges of touring (Cizek et.al, 2016) and issues of mental health among musicians (Gross and Musgrave, 2020). Those of us working and researching in these fields must keep up this work to shape the workplace we all live and work within.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this article have suggested that the music managers in this study are ethically and morally aware—they are 'moral agents' in Rest's (1986) terminology—but that their moral intent is negotiated in a non-institutionalised framework free from an acknowledgement of formal guidelines. Within this, the key decision-making nexus takes place in the form of a conversation between parties whose status as either a 'friend' or a 'professional colleague' is extremely blurred. At the same time however, the music managers in this study were

keenly aware of the social norms and context within which their decision-making took place as seen in their mean scores for Jones' (1991) concept of 'Social Consensus'. This suggests that perhaps what is required is not regulatory change (which would be difficult to articulate, problematic to enforce, and the findings here suggest likely to lack influence), but *cultural* change to help guide and inform the ethical decision-making of managers. This, of course, is a much slower process and one which, in many ways, feels frustrating when faced with unimaginable tragedy such as the loss of Avicii.

This study acts as only an introductory sketch to allow us to think more critically about the musician–manager relationship from an ethical or moral perspective. However, the relative standardisation of the research methodology might provide a helpful basis for other researchers interested in this topic and could allow the research design to be employed in other contexts and with larger or different samples. As was illustrated following the suicide of Avicii, understanding the complex dynamic between musicians and their managers is a vital task, and one where the answers are rarely simple, the evidence rarely clear and the outcomes rarely subtle. It is hoped that this article might be a preliminary step in opening up this conversation.

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