HONEST BEHAVIOR: TRUTH-SEEKING, BELIEF-SPEAKING, AND FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH IN OTHERS

BINYAMIN COOPER
TAYA R. COHEN
Carnegie Mellon University

ELIZABETH HUPPERT
Northwestern University

EMMA E. LEVINE
University of Chicago

WILLIAM FLEESON
Wake Forest University

While people across the world value honesty, it is undeniable that it can sometimes pay to be dishonest. This tension leads people to engage in complex behaviors that stretch the boundaries of honesty. Such behaviors include strategically avoiding information, dodging questions, omitting information, and making true but misleading statements. Though not lies per se, these are nonetheless deviations from honesty that have serious interpersonal, organizational, and societal costs. Based on a systematic review of 169 empirical research articles in the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics, we develop a new multidimensional framework of honesty that highlights how honesty encompasses more than the absence of lies—it has relational elements (e.g., fostering an accurate understanding in others through what we disclose and how we communicate) and intellectual elements (e.g., evaluating information for accuracy, searching for accurate information, and updating our beliefs accordingly). By acknowledging that honesty is not limited to the moment when a person utters a clear lie or a full truth, and that there are multiple stages to enacting honesty, we emphasize the shared responsibility that all parties involved in communication have for seeking out and communicating truthful information.

People across the world value honesty. They hold honesty in high esteem both in themselves and others (Abeler, Nosenzo, & Raymond, 2019; Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, & Goodwin, 2021; Hartley, Furr, Helzer, Jayawickreme, Velasquez, & Fleeson, 2016; Miller, 2021). Similarly, organizations espouse honesty as an aspiration and an obligation, emphasizing it in their mission statements, corporate philosophies,

and business codes (Blodgett, Dumas, & Zanzi, 2011; Gaumnitz & Lere, 2002; Kaptein, 2004; Wang, 2009). However, honesty can be costly. For example, honestly reporting low earnings can harm a company's valuation. A leader who honestly reports their failures might have a lower likelihood of re-election. In difficult conversations, such as those involving negative feedback or the delivery of bad news, honesty may have social costs (Fulham, Krueger, & Cohen, 2022; Gentile, 2012; Lavelle, Folger, & Manegold, 2016; Levine, Roberts, & Cohen, 2020; Scott, 2019; Shell, 2021; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010). In these situations, *dis*honesty may allow companies, leaders, and employees to improve their reputations (at least in the short term), and avoid conflict and hurt feelings (Keep, 2009).

To deal with this tension between the competing desires to be honest and to benefit from dishonesty, people employ a variety of interesting and complex communication strategies, some of which are dishonest and some of which are honest. Such behaviors include controlling the amount of information one discloses (e.g., Fu, Wu, & Zhang, 2019; Minson, VanEpps, Yip, & Schweitzer, 2018; Steinel, Utz, & Koning, 2010), burying contradictory information in legal disclaimers (DeJeu, 2022), making statements that are technically true but nonetheless create a misleading impression (i.e., paltering; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020), dodging or deflecting direct questions (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020; Rogers & Norton, 2011), adding humor to alter the significance of confessions (e.g., Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019), and modifying the tone (e.g., Fu et al., 2019) or complexity (e.g., Yuthas, Rogers, & Dillard, 2002) of one's message to emphasize or obscure the truth. Additionally, individuals strategically monitor their search for information to control the knowledge they have to share with others (e.g., Pennycook, Bear, Collins, & Rand, 2020) or to dismiss threatening evidence (e.g., Shani, Igou, & Zeelenberg, 2009). These strategies may not involve outright lying, but they do introduce greater complexity to the definitions of honesty and dishonesty. While these and other communication strategies have been investigated under the rubrics of honesty and dishonesty, they have been investigated in siloes. They have yet to be united by a common framework, and, as a result, our understanding of honesty is incomplete.

To bring together these disparate research streams and enhance our understanding of honesty, we introduce a new conceptual model of honesty and synthesize insights from the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics. Honesty involves an obligation to *not* misrepresent information, as well as obligations to responsibly gather information and to disclose gathered information in a way that fosters an accurate understanding in others (Gaumnitz & Lere, 2002). As such, it contains relational elements, as well as intellectual elements (e.g., evaluating information for accuracy, searching for accurate information, and updating our beliefs accordingly). By recognizing that honesty is not limited to the moment when a person utters a clear lie or a full truth, and that there are multiple stages to enacting honesty, we emphasize the shared responsibility that all parties involved in communication have for seeking out and communicating truthful information.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HONESTY

Inspired by corporate scandals and unethical behavior in organizations, research in the field of behavioral ethics and behavioral business ethics has often focused on the causes of dishonesty (De Cremer & Moore, 2020). Much of this work employs stylized, incentivized games to assess dishonesty, with a focus on sender–receiver deception games (Gneezy, 2005), coin-flip tasks (Bucciol & Piovesan, 2011), die-roll tasks (Fischbacher & Föllmi-Heusi, 2013), and matrix problem-solving tasks (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). More than 500 experiments have investigated lying and cheating using these tasks (Gerlach, Teodorescu, & Hertwig, 2019). As a result, researchers have established a large body of work regarding the prevalence and magnitude of dishonesty in these paradigms and documented a pervasive aversion to lying. However, these approaches carry an unstated assumption: individuals have two primary behaviors available to them when making ethical decisions—they can lie or they can tell the truth. We suggest instead that honesty is a complex phenomenon that is more than a single behavior; it is a communication act, and one that is not devoid of context (Fritz, 2020; LaFollette & Graham, 1986; White, 2022). Therefore, research using incentivized economics games should be complemented by other approaches to fully understand the conditions and processes that give rise to honesty.

Honest communication occurs within relationships and social situations, and thus cannot be fully represented by simple decisions to lie versus tell the truth. For example LaFollette and Graham (1986) characterized honesty as expressing one's truthful thoughts and feelings and ensuring these truths are effectively communicated. They noted that honesty is complex because it is an "attempted-achievement" (LaFollette & Graham, 1986: 14); honest communication must

be directed toward an individual, but, to have its intended effect, that individual must be capable of accurately constructing an understanding of the communication. As such, it is important to consider the broader context in which honest communications take place to understand how honest communications are received by targets (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019, 2020; Fu et al., 2019; Rogers & Norton, 2011), as well as the direct implications for targets' subsequent personal and professional well-being (Allan, 2015; VanEpps & Hart, 2022).

We propose that honesty is a dyadic process that starts before the communication act with the development and validation of the beliefs the communicator intends to share or withhold. Following belief formation, individuals must decide not only how truthfully to communicate, but also how much information to disclose and how to deliver this information to the target. We deviate from other conceptualizations of honesty in that we argue that a *completely* honest communication act requires the accurate statement of one's beliefs *and* the tailoring of one's statements to the intended target to foster understanding of the truth. The honesty process continues after the initial communication with elaboration, verification, and correction of the recipient's understanding of the message. Therefore, to understand honesty, researchers must consider all stages of this dyadic process, from belief formation to recipient understanding.

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF HONESTY RESEARCH

We completed an integrative systematic review of empirical research on honesty in the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics. To arrive at a comprehensive collection of peer-reviewed empirical articles to review, we followed a multistage process consisting of (a) article selection, (b) quality assessment (i.e., inclusion–exclusion of articles based on specific criteria), (c) data extraction (i.e., coding), (d) synthesis, (e) supplementary review, and (f) integration. A detailed description of the process is provided in the appendix in the online supplemental materials (additional information is provided on the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/pcg7m). We built our sample by retrieving articles published in the last two decades (from 2000 to 2021) using keyword searches of social science and business databases with the search terms *honest** OR *truth** OR *dishonest** OR *lie**, such that "*" indicates a term that matches the stem before the asterisk (e.g., *truthfulness* will be identified as a

FIGURE 1
### Empirical Publications Investigating Honest Behavior (2000–2021)
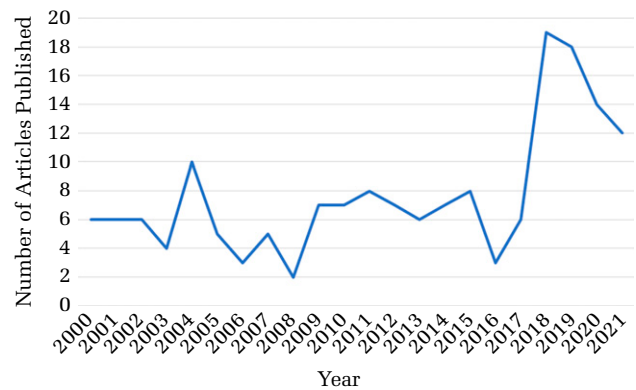
Notes: The figure shows the frequency of empirical articles published each year, from 2000 to 2021, about honesty, truth, dishonesty, or lies in management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics journals. We identified 169 empirical articles in 15 journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Management Science*, *Organization Studies*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Organization Science*, *Personnel Psychology*).

match to the stem of *truth**). We restricted the search to the archives of major journals in the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics represented in the *Financial Times*'s list of peer-reviewed journals ("FT50"), supplemented with several related journals known for publishing similar empirical research. This process led to the identification of 169 empirical articles in 15 journals. Figure 1 visualizes the distribution of articles over the search period, depicting an overall increasing trend of articles examining honest behavior, with a notable spike in 2018.[1]

In the synthesis stage of our review, we read and discussed each of the 169 articles, identifying similarities and distinctions among them. Several guiding insights emerged, which were useful in the subsequent structure of our literature review and development of an integrative framework for honest behavior. We

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[1] The spike in the number of articles in 2018 is largely attributed to more papers about honesty published in *Journal of Business Ethics* that year. Examination of these and the other articles published in 2018 did not reveal any obvious triggering events or commonalities among these papers.

FIGURE 2
A Multidimensional Framework of Honest Behavior
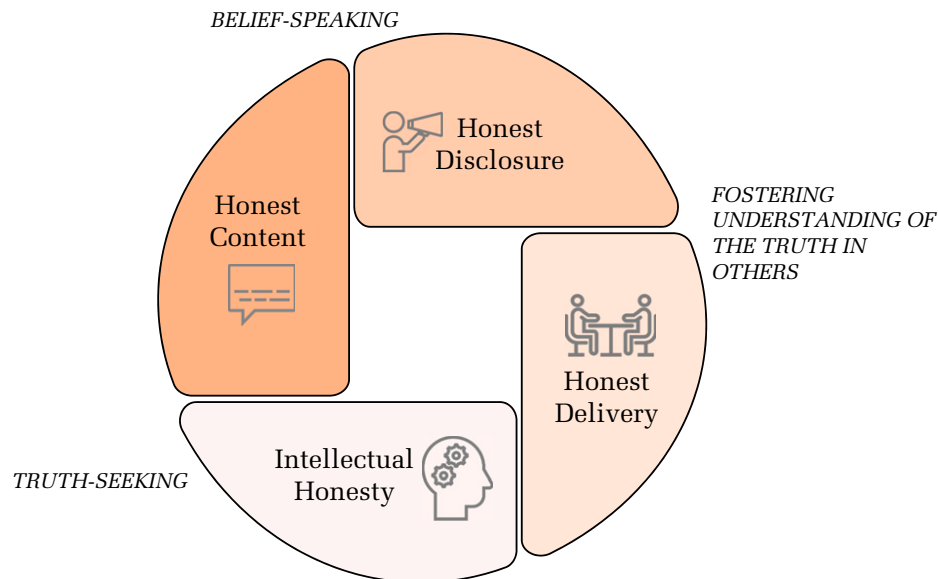
Notes: "Honest content" refers to the accuracy of the content a communicator shares. "Honest disclosure" refers to the amount and depth of disclosure by the communicator. "Honest delivery" refers to the manner in which the communicator shares or discloses information. "Intellectual honesty" refers to the process by which a communicator develops, validates, and updates their beliefs.

believe that the study of honest behavior can be classified according to four facets, as shown in Figure 2: (a) the accuracy of the content a communicator shares ("honest content"), (b) the amount and depth of disclosure by the communicator ("honest disclosure"), (c) the manner in which a communicator shares or discloses ("honest delivery"), and (d) the way a communicator develops, validates, and updates their beliefs ("intellectual honesty"). Table 1 shows the number of articles we coded in each facet. In the sections that follow, we discuss the findings, insights, and conclusions that emerged from our systematic review of the honesty literature. To ensure our review was comprehensive, for each facet of honest behavior, we conducted a broader supplementary search to discern additional insights from other literatures, which we elaborate on in the Discussion section.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK OF HONEST BEHAVIOR

Our systematic review supports our contention that honest behavior encompasses more than truthtelling. Though the majority of articles we reviewed operationalized honesty as accurate versus inaccurate reporting, focusing on the truthfulness of the information a communicator shares, this was not the case for all of the articles. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, each of the other facets of honesty in our framework emerged in our search as well. We were able to assign each of the 169 articles to at least one of the four facets, with only a few articles (13.61%) assigned to more than one category.

The diversity of approaches to the study of honesty across the articles we reviewed confirms that honesty is a complex phenomenon encompassing a wide array of intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors. Simply refraining from making false statements or distorting facts is insufficient. Rather, for behavior to be fully honest, we contend that the communicator (i.e., a person, group, or an organization) must seek the truth, speak the truth, and foster understanding of the truth in others. "Truth-seeking" involves evaluating information for accuracy, searching for accurate information, and incorporating accurate information into one's beliefs. The truth-seeking component of honesty connects most directly to the intellectual honesty code in our systematic review. Truth-seeking is the only component of honest behavior that we deem primarily intrapersonal rather than interpersonal. As shown in Table 1, this category of honest behavior was the least represented in our review. "Belief-speaking" involves accurately reporting and truthfully disclosing information in verbal or in written statements. The belief-speaking component of

TABLE 1
Empirical Publications Investigating Honest Behavior from 2000 to 2021

Facet	Honest Content		Honest Disclosure	Honest Delivery	Intellectual Honesty		
Categories	Accurate reporting of results, performance, or behaviors versus false reporting, lying, cheating, or theft	Instructions, incentives, or pledges to provide truthful and/or complete information, or penalties for providing false or incomplete information	Honest disclosure or truthful information sharing versus withholding or omission of truthful information	Delivering information in a way that enables receivers to develop an accurate understanding of the information	Evaluating information for accuracy versus inaccuracy	Searching for accurate information	Incorporating accurate information into one's beliefs
Count	111 (66%)	18 (11%)	26 (15%)	21 (12%)	5 (3%)	6 (4%)	3 (2%)

Notes: We identified 169 empirical articles about honesty, truth, dishonesty, or lies in 15 journals that cover the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics. Percentages are the number in each category out of 169 articles. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

honesty connects most directly to the honest content and honest disclosure codes used in our review. The majority of publications about honesty focus on acts of belief-speaking. Finally, "fostering understanding of the truth in others" involves communicating information in a way that enables receivers to develop an accurate understanding of the information. The fostering understanding component of honesty connects most directly to the honest disclosure and honest delivery codes in our systematic review. What a person chooses to share and how they choose to share it jointly influence whether their counterpart will develop true beliefs.

Notably, a communicator can deviate from honesty by knowingly or unknowingly failing to behave honestly in any of these areas, and the papers contained in our review describe many such deviations. For example, several of the articles that cut across multiple facets of our honesty framework focused on impression management techniques used by job applicants (e.g., Bourdage, Roulin, & Tarraf, 2018; Bourdage, Wiltshire, & Lee, 2015; Hogue, Levashina, & Hang, 2013; Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2015). Job applicants seeking to make a positive impression can deviate from honesty through lying (content), withholding relevant information (disclosure), and by communicating in an evasive manner that gives rise to misimpressions (delivery). For example, consider a job applicant who truthfully shares certain skills, abilities, qualifications, and common interests with an interviewer, while simultaneously directing the conversation away from any topic that might suggest a lack of fit and using an overly confident tone to obscure a lack of relevant work experience (Bourdage et al., 2018; Bourdage et al., 2015). In such cases, the way in which the job applicant communicates (delivery) and the information that the job seeker withholds (disclosure) could foster false beliefs in the interviewer even though the job seeker never made a false statement (content). Similarly, consider a CEO motivated to avoid a drop in stock prices. The CEO might truthfully communicate the firm's earnings to shareholders (content), but do so with an overly optimistic tone (delivery) that results in shareholders' misimpressions of the actual financial health of the company (Fu et al., 2019).

Traditional approaches to the study of honesty would characterize the job applicant's behavior and the CEO's behavior as honest because they satisfied the truth-telling requirement of the honest content category. We reject that view, because neither the job applicant's communication nor the CEO's communication are honest in their delivery or disclosure.

These examples highlight why the overwhelming focus on the accuracy of the content a communicator shares in the current literature on honesty is problematic. Our model frames honesty as a joint action involving communicators and recipients of the communication (Clark, 1996; Greco, 2020; White, 2022), emphasizing how the perspective of the recipients of the communication must be considered alongside the perspective of the communicators.

Incorporating the recipients' understanding of the truth into the conceptualization of honesty raises interesting questions about honest intentions versus outcomes. For example, how honest is an individual who intends to communicate truthfully, but, because of poor communication skills, consistently fails to instill true beliefs in communication recipients? Although the majority of research in moral psychology suggests that people primarily focus on others' intentions when judging honesty (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014), and moral behavior more generally (Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Levine, Mikhail, & Leslie, 2018), our view is that outcomes matter. We suggest that, to evaluate a communicator's honesty, we must consider both the communicator's intentions (e.g., do they intend to mislead or foster an accurate understanding) *and* their ability to enact their intentions (i.e., does the communication result in a misunderstanding or an accurate one). Accordingly, we would evaluate a communicator who intends to be honest but frequently fails to foster an understanding of the truth in others as less honest than a communicator who intends to be honest *and* effectively fosters an understanding of the truth in others.

In the sections that follow, we define each of the four facets of honest behavior and describe how they have been studied in the publications we reviewed. We then summarize key insights into the antecedents and consequences of honest behavior.

Honest Content

The most common conceptualization of honesty that appeared in our review was as a behavior primarily concerned with truth-telling as opposed to lying. We label this category "honest content" and define the category as "the accuracy of the content a communicator shares." We used two separate codes to summarize the work on honest content: (a) *accurate reporting of results, performance, or behaviors versus false reporting, lying, cheating, or theft*; and (b) *instructions, incentives, or pledges to provide truthful or complete information, or penalties for providing false or incomplete information.* The latter

code was assigned to articles that experimentally manipulated the expression of honest content, as in, for example, studies of the efficacy of honesty oaths (Beck, Bühren, Frank, & Khachatryan, 2020; Jacquemet, Luchini, Rosaz, & Shogren, 2019), and studies with instructions to participants acting as job applicants to answer interview or personality assessment questions honestly versus how an ideal job candidate would answer them (Day & Carroll, 2008; Dunlop et al., 2020; Hauenstein, Bradley, O'Shea, Shah, & Magill, 2017). Overall, 123 articles (73%) were assigned one of these codes (111 were articles assigned the first code; 18 assigned the second code; 12 articles assigned both codes), confirming our assumption that the bulk of empirical studies of honesty and dishonesty focus on what we conceptualize as *belief-speaking behaviors.*

Most of the papers in the honest content category operationalized honesty as the opposite of lying, in that participants faced a binary choice between lying and telling the truth. Many of these articles employed experimental games. Experimental games can "provide a coherent, substantive model of many actual encounters" (Murnighan & Wang, 2016: 80) and have been shown to predict consequential decisions outside of the laboratory (Cohn & Maréchal, 2018; Dai, Galeotti, & Villeval, 2018; Olsen, Hjorth, Harmon, & Barfort, 2019; Potters & Stoop, 2016; Schild, Lilleholt, & Zettler, 2021; Tobol, Siniver, & Yaniv, 2020). However, these paradigms cannot represent the complex totality of interpersonal interactions involving honesty or dishonesty.

Despite the pervasiveness of experimental games in the honesty literature, our search also revealed many other methods for investigating the communication of honest content. Our review identified, for example, studies of the communication of honest content in the contexts of negotiation (e.g., Aquino & Becker, 2005; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Kim, Diekmann, & Tenbrunsel, 2003; Olekalns, Kulik, & Chew, 2014; Pierce & Thompson, 2021; SimanTov-Nachlieli, Har-Vardi, & Moran, 2020), providing feedback (e.g., Ho & Yeung, 2014; Kim et al., 2003; Oc, Bashshur, & Moore, 2015), completing job applications (e.g., Day & Carroll, 2008; Hauenstein et al., 2017; Heggestad, Morrison, Reeve, & McCloy, 2006; Hogue et al., 2013; Roulin & Krings, 2020; Shoss & Strube, 2011; Stark, Chernyshenko, Chan, Lee, & Drasgow, 2001), filing taxes (e.g., Berger, Guo, & King, 2020; Górecki & Letki, 2020; LaMothe & Bobek, 2020), and reporting firms' earnings (e.g., Lapointe-Antunes, Veenstra, Brown, & Li, 2021; Yuthas et al., 2002). Auditing and accounting ethics emerged as a

research area that stood out for the variety of methods employed to study honesty, with studies using archival data (Chu, Du, & Jiang, 2011; Vladu, Amat, & Cuzdriorean, 2017; Warren & Schweitzer, 2018), surveys (Buchheit, Pasewark, & Strawser, 2003; Guiral, Rodgers, Ruiz, & Gonzalo, 2010; Salter, Guffey, & McMillan, 2001), and controlled experiments (Blay, Gooden, Mellon, & Stevens, 2019; Kerler & Killough, 2009).

Honest Disclosure

The amount of information a communicator discloses and the degree to which communicators candidly share their opinions can impact honesty, regardless of the accuracy of one's statements. We define this category of honesty, focused on the depth and amount of information shared, as "honest disclosure." We coded articles related to *truthful information sharing versus withholding or omission of truthful information* as indicative of this category. Although both honest content and disclosure relate to the information a communicator chooses to share, the two are conceptually distinct and complementary. The honest content facet of our framework captures lying (i.e., making a false statement) versus telling the truth, and, thus, is a binary choice. Disclosure, on the other hand, is considerably more complex, due to the many ways people can deviate from complete and transparent disclosure of information and opinions. It is also more complex because some information withholding may be dishonest while other information withholding can be completely honest and appropriate. For example, when negotiating, it is generally inadvisable to share your best alternative to a negotiated agreement (i.e., BATNA) or your "bottom line" (i.e., reservation price) with your negotiation counterparty (Thompson, 2020). Whereas lying about this information (e.g., saying you have another offer when you do not; saying your budget is less than what it actually is) is dishonest, withholding information about your BATNA and reservation price (e.g., by indicating you are not willing or able to disclose that information) is *not* dishonest. Research on disclosure, in particular, sheds light on honesty as a social-relational process. Disclosure represents an aspect of honest communication that exists at the intersection of belief-speaking (i.e., accurate reporting) and fostering understanding (i.e., communicating information in a way that enables recipients to develop an accurate understanding of the information).

Honest disclosure has been studied in the contexts of both personal and professional disclosures. Research on personal disclosure has focused on information that is central to the communicator's self or identity, be it disclosing one's sexual orientation (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Van Laer, 2018), accurately disclosing one's skills in interviews (Bourdage et al., 2018; Bourdage et al., 2015; Hogue et al., 2013; Roulin & Krings, 2020), honestly disclosing concerns related to equity and inclusion (Warren & Warren, 2021), or the expression of authentic emotions by service employees in their interactions with customers (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Work in this area connects to research on authenticity by investigating how people navigate challenges related to making positive impressions through catering to others' preferences as opposed to honestly disclosing personal information (Costas & Fleming, 2009; O'Brien & Linehan, 2019).

In contrast, research on professional disclosure has focused on strategic decision-making related to information that is of a potentially sensitive nature to the organization or group in which a communicator is embedded. Studies in this area have examined, for example, disclosures to investors in conference calls (Fu et al., 2019) and in corporate annual reports (Yuthas et al., 2002). Other studies have investigated truthful information sharing across divisions of a firm, such as between the sales and operations divisions (Scheele, Thonemann, & Slikker, 2018), within group decision-making (Steinel et al., 2010), during negotiations (Kim et al., 2003; Minson et al., 2018), and when delivering bad news, such as when managers communicate layoff decisions (Lavelle et al., 2016). A prevalent theme identified in research on organizational codes of ethics is the obligation to make full disclosures (i.e., to include all information), complementary to the obligation to not misrepresent information (Gaumnitz & Lere, 2002), supporting our conceptualization of disclosure as its own aspect of honesty alongside honest content.

Honest Delivery

In our relational view of honesty, honest delivery is important because it explicitly accounts for the existence of a recipient in the exchange of information. We define the category of "honest delivery" as "delivering information in a way that enables recipients to develop an accurate understanding of the information." When communicators want their recipients to develop an accurate understanding of the truth, they can adeptly facilitate understanding by modifying their communication such that recipients can easily attend to, understand, and draw accurate conclusions. At the same time, when communicators do *not* want their

recipients to develop an accurate understanding of the truth, they can likewise inhibit understanding by modifying the way they communicate so that recipients are distracted, misunderstand, or draw inaccurate conclusions. Much of the research we reviewed focused on ways communicators inhibit, rather than facilitate, recipients' understanding of the truth. This focus on obfuscation suggests there is an opportunity for future work to consider how better communication delivery techniques can make it easier for recipients to develop accurate beliefs. For example, how might feedback-givers better structure their communication so that recipients can easily discern the truth in the feedback they are given (Fulham et al., 2022)?

Collectively, the articles related to honest delivery demonstrate how communicators face a wide array of choices in deciding how to communicate, beyond simply how much and what they say. For example, communicators might modify the positivity or negativity of their tone (Fu et al., 2019), how much humor they use when communicating (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019), the speed with which they speak or react to questions (Walczyk, Schwartz, Clifton, Adams, Wei, & Zha, 2005), or the amount of time they spend communicating when delivering bad news (Lavelle et al., 2016). There are many aspects of verbal and written communication delivery that can affect how comprehensible, truthful, sincere, and legitimate communications are perceived to be (Yuthas et al., 2002), and the articles we reviewed capture a variety of nuanced communication techniques people use to ensure others do or do not develop an understanding of the truth. Research in this area reveals how challenges related to communication delivery occur in a wide array of conversations with customers, stockholders, employees, supervisors, and coworkers (Bourdage et al., 2018; Bourdage et al., 2015; Brunner & Ostermaier, 2019; Dunlop et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2019; Glozer, Caruana, & Hibbert, 2019; Hogue et al., 2013; Llewellyn & Harrison, 2006; Pitesa, Goh, & Thau, 2018; Roulin et al., 2015; Strong, Ringer, & Taylor, 2001; Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Jonsen, & Morner, 2018; Yuthas et al., 2002).

Intellectual Honesty

Thus far, we have discussed the relational elements of honest communication involving communication content, disclosure, and delivery with an underlying assumption that the information a communicator intends to share is accurate to begin with. However, individuals may fail to hold accurate beliefs for a variety of reasons, including both deliberate ignorance and unintentional false beliefs. As such, we argue that another important element of honest behavior is intrapersonal and concerns the role of the communicator in ensuring their beliefs are accurate. We define the category of "intellectual honesty" via three elements, as "the process in which communicators (a) evaluate information for accuracy, (b) search for accurate information, and (c) incorporate accurate information into their beliefs."

Only 11 articles we identified through our search fit the intellectual honesty codes, and none of the authors of these papers used the term *intellectual honesty* to describe their work (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Bourdage et al., 2018; Bourdage et al., 2015; Dannals, Reit, & Miller, 2020; Issa & Pick, 2010; Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012; Pennycook et al., 2020; Porter, Kuhn, & Nerlich, 2018; Roulin et al., 2015; Shani et al., 2009; Warren & Warren, 2021). As a set, these papers reveal how intellectual honesty is a multistage process involving information search, evaluation, and updating of beliefs, when appropriate, and that a failure in any of these three steps can be considered a deviation from complete honesty. Incorporating information search, evaluation, and updating of beliefs into our multidimensional honesty framework helps to explain why selective information exposure and strategic or deliberate ignorance compromise a person's ability to behave honestly. There is an assumption on the part of listeners that speakers have been responsible in their acquisition of knowledge; being negligent or reckless in acquisition of knowledge is dishonest. Accordingly, to deepen our understanding of intellectual honesty, future work should aim to more thoroughly integrate insights from the literatures on motivated reasoning (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2021b; Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017; Kahan, 2012; Kunda, 1990), willful ignorance (Dana, Weber, & Kuang, 2007; Dorison, Minson, & Rogers, 2019; Levine & Munguia Gomez, 2021; Minson & Dorison, 2022; Woolley & Risen, 2018), and intellectual humility (Porter, Elnakouri, Meyers, Shibayama, Jayawickreme, & Grossmann, 2022; Warren & Warren, 2021).

Two articles we reviewed highlighted the role of intellectual honesty in the context of the ongoing climate change debate. Lefsrud and Meyer's (2012) work emphasized the importance of building a communicator's expertise by gathering true knowledge and evaluating unbiased research, which involves all three elements of intellectual honesty. Porter and colleagues (2018) focused on how recipients perceive communicators that provide reliable information as authority figures, and called attention to the importance of consistently exhibiting intellectual

honesty to build a reputation as an honest communicator. These articles show the importance of accurate belief formation and truth-seeking for effectively contributing to conversations on contested topics.

ANTECEDENTS OF HONEST BEHAVIOR

Now we turn our attention to the key insights that emerged about the antecedents of honest behavior. The honesty process begins with forming accurate beliefs (intellectual honesty) and sharing them truthfully (honest content) and ends with disclosing relevant information (honest disclosure) in a way (honest delivery) that fosters an understanding of the truth in a recipient. As such, we begin our discussion of antecedents by focusing on intellectual honesty.

Intellectual Honesty

Communicating honestly requires efforts to ensure one *has* accurate information. These efforts may be time consuming and require self-directed research (Warren & Warren, 2021), and can even lead to unpleasant truths (Shani et al., 2009). Yet, being able to question one's beliefs and seek out new information is essential for communicators to gain accurate information and understanding. In their EThIC model of virtue-based allyship development, Warren and Warren (2021: 10) referred to this idea as "intellectual humility," which they defined as "the internal recognition and externally expressed awareness of one's intellectual limitations, and the internal recognition and externally expressed appreciation for other people's intellect." Emotions, social groups, and explicit labeling about information accuracy can all impact the extent to which communicators are intellectually honest.

For example, research on emotions and intellectual honesty suggests that feeling discomfort with "not knowing" can motivate the search for unpleasant truths to relieve the distress of uncertainty (Shani et al., 2009). This work implies that the process of obtaining accurate information in and of itself can be a positive affective experience. Even when the truth is unpleasant, the search process of discovering accurate information can alleviate uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty. In this way, people may be affectively motivated to engage in intellectual honesty in some circumstances. However, when emotions are not prompting the search for information, people may need external encouragement to question and update their beliefs.

Information seeking is also influenced by social structures. Status and group membership can impact perceptions of honesty and information accuracy. For example, people view lower-ranked team members as having more accurate social information than higher-ranked team members (Dannals et al., 2020). These findings suggest that people may be more inclined to accept information as accurate in some social circumstances, and, conversely, more willing to question information accuracy in others.

Explicitly telling people whether information has been verified can also affect intellectual honesty. People assume veracity in information when it is not labeled as "disputed" or as false (Pennycook et al., 2020). In other words, people may hold a default assumption of truth (Levine, 2022), but providing information about how content was previously evaluated (i.e., verified or disputed, etc.) may help trigger more thorough evaluation of information, and potentially even updating of beliefs.

Honest Content

Once a person has developed accurate (or inaccurate) beliefs, they face a series of complex social decisions about whether and how to share these beliefs honestly. The papers included in our review primarily focus on how formal regulations, social norms, and individual differences influence the propensity to communicate honest content.

Several papers demonstrate how organizations can influence the communication of honest content through incentives and rules (Scheele et al., 2018; Wang & Murnighan, 2017). For example, formal oaths can increase honest reporting (Beck et al., 2020; Jacquemet et al., 2019), as can small bonuses for honesty (even if somewhat larger bonuses are tied to dishonesty; Wang & Murnighan, 2017). Direct instructions mandating honesty are also successful, so much so that many researchers use such instructions to increase honesty within their studies (e.g., Day & Carroll, 2008; Dunlop et al., 2020; Hauenstein et al., 2017; Heggestad et al., 2006; McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Pitesa et al., 2018; Shoss & Strube, 2011; van Hooft & Born, 2012; Van Iddekinge, Raymark, & Roth, 2005). Indeed, it is noteworthy that people are more likely to report accurate information when they are simply asked to do so.

Social norms also influence people's propensity to communicate honest content; for example, by moderating the effectiveness of honesty interventions. A field experiment by Ayal, Celse, and Hochman (2021) found that posters with watching eyes reduced fare evasion in train stations in France, but only when the posters were coupled with descriptive social norm messaging (e.g., "In this station,

90% of all individuals purchase and validate their ticket"). Likewise, Górecki and Letki (2020) found that an increasing tax rate lowered the probability of tax evasion, so long as one viewed "most others" (i.e., descriptive norm) as honest taxpayers. People can also infer norms based on the communication and behavior of others. When people engage in morally-oriented conversations, they may perceive ethical behavior to be a norm and communicate more honestly as a result (Gunia, Wang, Huang, Wang, & Murnighan, 2012). Conversely, when people engage in conversations about the benefits of deception, it can erode moral norms and set the stage for dishonesty (Kocher, Schudy, & Spantig, 2018). Leaders play a particularly important role in shaping honesty norms (Cialdini, Li, Samper, & Wellman, 2021).

A large body of research has also examined how the communication of honest content hinges on people's baseline differences in their honesty-related attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors. Trait honesty, or *honest character*, can be conceptualized as an individual's tendency to believe in the importance of being honest, to be motivated toward honesty, to behave in honest ways, and to see oneself as an honest person. Trait honesty reliably explains substantial variance in lying versus truth-telling (e.g., Bernardi, Metzger, Scofield Bruno, Wade Hoogkamp, Reyes, & Barnaby, 2004; Dierdorff & Fisher, 2021; Gentina, Tang, & Gu, 2017; Hershfield, Cohen, & Thompson, 2012; Marcus, Lee, & Ashton, 2007; Sosik, Chun, Ete, Arenas, & Scherer, 2019). This conclusion is supported by research on "honesty–humility" (HH)—a broad personality trait from the HEXACO model that a number of papers in our review examined[2] (Bourdage et al., 2018; Bourdage et al., 2015; Dierdorff & Fisher, 2021; Hershfield et al., 2012; Holtrop, Born, & de Vries, 2015; Marcus et al., 2007; Marcus & Roy, 2019; Sosik et al., 2019; Sverko & Babarovic, 2016). Beyond HH, researchers have investigated other individual differences that influence truth-telling, although none that we reviewed received as much specific focus as HH.

Nonetheless, because these other personality characteristics predict honest behavior, they might also be conceived of as components of trait honesty (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2021). These characteristics include, for example, conscientiousness (Bourdage et al., 2018; McFarland & Ryan, 2000), agreeableness (DeRue, Conlon, Moon, & Willaby, 2009), empathy (Cohen, 2010), guilt proneness (Cohen, 2010), ethical reasoning (Granitz & Loewy, 2007), and low Machiavellianism (Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, 2018; Dierdorff & Fisher, 2021). People who feel greater connection between their present and future selves act more honestly (Hershfield et al., 2012), as do people for whom morality is more central to their identity (Johnson, Martin, Stikeleather, & Young, 2021; Mulder & Aquino, 2013; Xu & Ma, 2015). As with HH, each of these traits is indicative of moral character more broadly, and associated with ethical behaviors that extend beyond honesty specifically (Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014).

Notably, existing research on honest content also highlights how both truth-telling and lying can stem from a variety of motives. Lying can result from prosocial, other-oriented motives as well as selfish ones (Castille et al., 2018; Erat & Gneezy, 2012; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Lupoli, Levine, & Greenberg, 2018; Rixom & Mishra, 2014; Wiltermuth, 2011; Wiltermuth, Bennett, & Pierce, 2013). As summarized by Keep (2009), key motivations for dishonesty include (a) avoiding confrontation or conflict, (b) ensuring quality in the delivery of a product or service, (c) buying time for an organization's strategy to play out, and (d) self-protection or self-enhancement.

Even when people do not set out to communicate deceptively, they may choose to do so if they do not have the requisite self-control to resist temptation or communication skills to successfully navigate difficult conversations with their integrity in tact (Keep, 2009; Levine et al., 2020; Walczyk et al., 2005; Whitson, Wang, Kim, Cao, & Scrimpshire, 2015). In general, people are less likely to communicate truthfully the more difficult they expect honesty to be (Lee, Ong, Parmar, & Amit, 2019).

Honest Disclosure

Many of the antecedents that prompt honest content also prompt greater disclosure. Incentives (Scheele et al., 2018), social norms (Brunner & Ostermaier, 2019; Górecki & Letki, 2020), and organizational cultures can influence the degree to which communicators honestly disclose information. When managers feel that organizational processes are fair, they honestly disclose more information to layoff victims, as

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[2] Although this broad trait includes honesty in its name, it is broader than honesty in scope, encompassing four distinct facets: fairness, greed avoidance, sincerity, and modesty (Ashton & Lee, 2007, 2008, 2020). In support of its conceptualization as trait honesty, two separate meta-analyses have demonstrated consistent, robust relationships between measures of HH and indicators of (dis)honesty (Heck, Thielmann, Moshagen, & Hilbig, 2018; Zettler, Thielmann, Hilbig, & Moshagen, 2020). Recent work also indicates that HH predicts less dishonesty in romantic relationships (Reinhardt & Reinhard, 2023).

opposed to refusing to explain decisions to them (Lavelle et al., 2016). When employees feel that their organizations respect different identities (e.g., nonheterosexual orientation; Griffith & Hebl, 2002), and promote a sense of autonomy (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), they are more likely to disclose their identities and feelings to peers and customers. Communicators' disclosure decisions also influence the extent to which their communication *partners* engage in disclosure, highlighting the important role of peer influence on honest disclosure (Brunner & Ostermaier, 2019).

As with the sharing of honest content, individuals' goals and motivations can also influence disclosure. For example, a desire to avoid conflict can influence both whether communicators share accurate versus inaccurate information and whether they choose to disclose information at all (Keep, 2009). Individuals with a prosocial orientation honestly reveal important and private information to group members more so than do individuals with a pro-self orientation (Steinel et al., 2010).

One antecedent to honesty that has been uniquely studied in the context of disclosure is question-asking. Asking negative assumption questions—questions that assume a problem exists—is particularly effective. Minson and coauthors (2018) illustrated this by showing that hiring managers are more likely to honestly disclose past HR complaints when an interviewee asks "How many major complaints has your HR received since that lawsuit from a couple years ago?" (a negative assumption question) than "Your HR hasn't received any major complaints since that lawsuit from a couple years ago, right?" (a positive assumption question). Attempts to verify information and provide feedback to communicators may also prompt honest disclosures. Social media users report a greater likelihood of sharing news stories when they learn that the stories have been verified as truthful (Pennycook et al., 2020). Negotiators are more likely to honestly disclose flaws in a product they are selling when they previously received negative feedback about their ethicality (Kim et al., 2003).

Honest Delivery

There is still much to learn about antecedents of honest delivery. The studies we coded as related to honest delivery were diverse in their focus and methods, encompassing traits, message properties, and situational antecedents. Several papers we reviewed highlighted the interconnectedness between content and delivery by showing that the nature of

the information communicators must share—for example, whether the information is surprising (Yuthas et al., 2002) or unfair (Lavelle et al., 2016)—can influence the clarity with which communicators deliver that information. For example, firms that were anticipating surprising news—regardless of whether the news was surprisingly bad or good—wrote annual reports with clearer, more concrete, and more vivid language than did firms not anticipating surprising news (Yuthas et al., 2002). Such practices increased the likelihood of stakeholders understanding the news. Conversely, managers having to deliver unfair and bad news have been shown to be less thorough and clear in how they convey that information to victims (Lavelle et al., 2016).

Summary

Findings from our literature review suggest that there are many motivations, as well as obstacles, to enacting honesty, beginning from the search for information and ending with successful delivery of one's beliefs in a way that fosters an understanding of the truth in others. Having reviewed the antecedents of honest behavior, we now discuss the consequences.

CONSEQUENCES OF HONEST BEHAVIOR

Intellectual Honesty

Despite the importance of intellectual honesty for developing and sharing honest information, no papers identified in our systematic review explicitly examined the consequences of intellectual honesty. We return to this issue in the Discussion section, where we describe related research from our supplementary search. We consider how research on intellectual humility and motivated reasoning could help us develop deeper insights about intellectual honesty and the consequences thereof.

Honest Content

In contrast to intellectual honesty, many papers we reviewed examined the consequences of lying and truth-telling. One broad theme of this work is that communicators generally want to be honest and to think of themselves as honest, and, therefore, their emotions and self-concept often suffer when they lie. Lying, for example, can elicit anxiety (Kouchaki & Desai, 2015) and lead communicators to effortfully reaffirm their moral self-concept (Johnson et al., 2021; Marcus & Roy, 2019). In order to avoid these psychological costs, communicators may engage in a

host of neutralization strategies (e.g., minimizing a lie, denigrating a target, and denial; Aquino & Becker, 2005), and rationalization strategies (Berger et al., 2020; Chu et al., 2011).

Lying also has social costs. Even when intended to benefit another person, lies are typically seen as unethical and elicit negative affect among recipients of the lie (Chu, So, & Chung, 2018; Lupoli et al., 2018). Although lies that are seen as beneficial *by recipients* might be seen as ethical, they can still decrease integrity-based trust (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). In other words, when communicators report inaccurate information, recipients may not trust the information they provide in future interactions. When dishonest reporting is revealed, this can also lead to a spiral of dishonest behavior vis-à-vis peer influence (Brunner & Ostermaier, 2019; Olekalns & Smith, 2007).

Whereas lying is often costly in the long run, communicating truthfully is often beneficial in the long run. People and organizations are often rewarded when they share honest content. For example, people who are perceived to be honest are less likely to face social exclusion (Whitson et al., 2015) and are more likely to be trusted in negotiations (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al., 2020) and as leaders (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Offermann & Malamut, 2002; Sosik et al., 2019; Stevens, 2013).

Honest Disclosure

The consequences of disclosure are complicated, and it is difficult to discern from the current body of work whether honest disclosure gives rise, primarily, to positive or negative consequences. On the one hand, like research on honest content, which typically emphasizes the problems associated with dishonesty, research on concealment highlights the emotional and psychological costs of withholding information. For instance, when employees hide aspects of their identity, such as their sexual orientation, they can experience heightened anxiety and lower job satisfaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Behaving authentically typically requires some level of honest disclosure and failing to do so can harm performance because of the anxiety, emotional dissonance, and self-alienation associated with hiding information about one's self (Costas & Fleming, 2009; O'Brien & Linehan, 2019). Failing to disclose relevant information can also inhibit social learning. For example, if negotiation partners fail to disclose feedback about their counterpart's unethical behavior,

their counterparts may act dishonestly in future negotiations (Kim et al., 2003).

On the other hand, research on disclosure also highlights the challenges or costs associated with honesty. When individuals disclose professional or personal weaknesses, they can be penalized for it. For example, employees who honestly disclose service interruptions to clients may face complaints (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Job applicants who disclose their lack of training may be seen as incompetent. However, adding humor to these disclosures can mitigate some of the potential negative consequences of disclosing (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019).

Honest Delivery

Although few papers examined the antecedents of honest delivery, several papers investigated consequences of this final facet of honesty. At the organizational level, stakeholders of financial institutions (i.e., customers, stockholders, and employees) tend to be more satisfied when the institutions deliver information in a complete and timely manner so that the stakeholders can accurately understand the information, and in a way that signals empathy and concern for the equitable treatment of others (Strong et al., 2001). In job interviews, honest impression management techniques in which interviewees draw attention to their strengths can help interviewees make more positive impressions on interviewers (Roulin et al., 2015). Adding humor to the delivery of negative information can minimize the impact of the negative information, reducing the recipient's belief in the veracity of the information while increasing the recipient's attributions of warmth and competence of the communicator (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019).

Other studies examined the impact of honest delivery on communicators themselves. Pitesa and colleagues (2018) investigated honesty in product promotion contexts. Delivering information to customers in a way that is less than honest (e.g., expressing more positivity than communicators actually feel) can cause salespeople to perceive themselves as less honest, which in turn is associated with perceiving others as less honest, and ultimately leads to a breakdown in trust.

Summary

As reviewed, behaving honestly has consequences for both communicators and the recipients of communication acts, on both an individual and an organizational level. These consequences can be

positive, but, unfortunately, not always. Sometimes, the truth really does hurt, though typically not as much as we expect (Levine & Cohen, 2018).

DISCUSSION

Thus far, we have presented our synthesis of honesty as it is studied in the management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics research literatures, with specific focus on empirical evidence for the multifaceted nature of honest behavior. The review revealed disproportionate research attention on factors that affect whether communicators make false versus true statements (i.e., honest content), as opposed to, for example, antecedents of honest delivery or intellectual honesty. Table 2 highlights themes and sample findings from our review and identifies opportunities for future research— areas in which there were few, if any, empirical publications in the journals we searched.

The narrow focus on honest content, which largely reduces the study of honesty to lying versus truth-telling, is problematic for several reasons. First, reducing the standard of honesty to "not lying" allows communicators to feel they behaved ethically while still leaving the door open to serious deception and the harms associated with it. Moreover, conceptualizing honesty as a binary choice between making true versus false statements ignores interesting and prevalent communication behaviors that satisfy some of the requirements of honesty but deviate from others, such as paltering or omission.

Honesty researchers should broaden their focus by addressing questions about how communicators arrive at their beliefs and how recipients of communication understand information based on what communicators share and the ways in which they communicate. We must consider not just what people do or do not say, but also how beliefs are formed, the extent to which beliefs are updated, and whether recipients walk away from communication exchanges with the same beliefs as communicators. It is only by understanding nuanced honesty-related behaviors holistically, and in relation to one another, that we can develop effective methods for cultivating the virtue of honesty in people and organizations.

To further our understanding of relatively underexplored aspects of honesty and to identify possible directions for future research, we conducted a supplementary literature search to complement the findings from our systematic review. In the remaining sections, we discuss ideas from other literatures that can inform our understanding of honest behavior and we provide ideas for future research on honesty.

Intellectual Humility and Motivated Reasoning

Intellectual honesty is challenging; it requires substantial cognitive and emotional efforts to achieve. Cognitive effort is required to search for information and evaluate it for accuracy. Emotional effort is required to manage the discomfort that can arise from questioning one's beliefs and opening oneself up to the possibility of being wrong. Fortunately, there is much management researchers can learn about intellectual honesty from other fields, including philosophy and social psychology, and this could provide a jumping-off point for future organizational research on intellectual honesty.

Philosophers have pointed out that intellectually virtuous honesty requires that a person care about the truth and be motivated by a desire to convey the truth and not distort it (King, 2021), and that such honesty requires skill (Byerly, 2022). Intellectual humility enables intellectually honest behavior by facilitating openness to questioning one's beliefs and acknowledging the limits of one's knowledge. Empirical work on intellectual humility has shown that it is more difficult to be intellectually humble about strongly held and personal beliefs, such as one's religious or moral beliefs (Porter et al., 2022). Concerns about group loyalty and solidarity can amplify this challenge. For example, a communicator that is concerned with their group status may cling to group ideology over other information (Porter et al., 2022), even when this ideology is inconsistent with logical arguments. Likewise, intellectual honesty can be impeded by the degree to which the issues are politically contentious, such as when evaluating information about climate change (Kahan et al., 2012) or the effectiveness of firearms regulation (Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2017).

Recent research on motivated reasoning also highlights the discomfort associated with confronting counter-attitudinal information (Minson & Dorison, 2022). Successfully overcoming such discomfort is challenging, as research suggests that individuals overestimate how uncomfortable they will feel when engaging with counter-attitudinal information, leading them to instead seek information that aligns with their beliefs (Dorison et al., 2019). Moreover, it is not only the case that people seek belief-confirming information and take efforts to avoid information that runs counter to deeply held beliefs, but they may also think evidence is not *necessary* for certain personal beliefs. For example, morality is seen as a

TABLE 2
Sample Findings and Opportunities for Future Research

	Antecedents of Honesty			Consequences of Honesty	
Facet of honest behavior	Individual	Social & organizational	Other contextual factors	Individual	Social & organizational
Intellectual honesty	(−) Negative emotions (discomfort of not knowing; Shani et al., 2009)	(−) Hierarchical rank (lower-ranking individuals are seen as having more accurate information; Dannals et al., 2020)	(+) Labeling (truth-labeling influences acceptance; Pennycook et al., 2020)	Opportunity for future research	Opportunity for future research
Honest content	(+) Honesty–humility (Marcus et al., 2017) (+) Conscientiousness (Bourdage et al., 2018) (+) Agreeableness (DeRue et al., 2009) (+) Empathy (Cohen, 2010) (+) Guilt proneness (Cohen, 2010) (+) Ethical reasoning (Granitz & Loewy, 2007) (−) Machiavellianism (Castille et al., 2018)	(+) Incentives (Wang & Murnighan, 2017) (+) Instructions (Dunlop et al., 2020) (+) Codes of conduct (Umphress, Ren, Bingham, & Gogus, 2009) (+) Oaths (Jacquemet et al., 2019) (+) Conversations (Gunia et al., 2012)	(+) Social norms (Ayal et al., 2021)	(−) Negative emotions and self-concept threat (Berger et al., 2020)	(+) Trust and moral judgment (Lupoli et al., 2018) (−) Exclusion (Whitson et al., 2015)
Honest disclosure	Opportunity for future research	(+) Incentives (Scheele et al., 2018)	(+) Social norms (Brunner & Ostermaier, 2019) (+) Question asking (Minson et al., 2018)	(−) Negative emotions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002)	(+) Social learning (Kim et al., 2003) (+) Trust and moral judgment (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019)
Honest delivery	Opportunity for future research	Opportunity for future research	(+) Surprising information (Yuthas et al., 2002) (−) Unfair information (Lavelle et al., 2016)	(−) Self-concept threat (Pitesa et al., 2018)	(+) Stakeholder satisfaction (Strong et al., 2001) (+) Positive impressions (Roulin et al., 2015)

Notes: Plus (+) indicates an association with more honesty. Minus (−) indicates an association with less honesty.

legitimate reason for forming beliefs, independent of impartial evidence (Cusimano & Lombrozo, 2021a). This work is informative for understanding antecedents and consequences of truth-seeking behaviors in organizations and beyond. When people believe they have a moral, political, or familial obligation to uphold certain beliefs, truth-seeking—and, therefore, honest communication—is likely to be significantly stifled.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Tactics

Despite the importance of communication delivery to honesty, we identified relatively few papers that focused on this topic. Integrating communication delivery into the study of honest behavior raises fascinating questions related to when, why, and how communicators deliver honest content in a way that facilitates understanding versus misleads recipients. A growing body of research on the social psychology of communication has begun to address these questions. Much of this work is informed by classic research on politeness (Brown, Levinson, & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967, 2009), and the verbal strategies that communicators use in difficult conversations, such as when delivering bad news or criticism. Rather than lying, communicators often equivocate, by redirecting the conversation or being intentionally vague (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990; DePaulo & Bell, 1996). Levine, Roberts, and Cohen (2020) described these sorts of communication behaviors as "compromising strategies" because they aim to strike a balance between honesty and benevolence (i.e., promoting the well-being of the target), but often fall short on both of these goals. For example, communicators may choose to answer a different question than the one that they were asked, in order to redirect a conversation away from an uncomfortable topic (dodging; Rogers & Norton, 2011). Similarly, communicators may choose to answer a question with a question, thus redirecting a conversation rather than providing an answer (deflecting; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020). Alternatively, communicators may avoid outright deception by using truthful statements to intentionally mislead targets (paltering; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020). Although none of the aforementioned tactics involve explicit lies, these communication behaviors are also not fully honest because they prevent communication recipients from developing an accurate understanding of the truth. Moreover, these communication tactics are not fully benevolent either because they fail to help the recipient learn and improve. However, precisely *because* these tactics allow communicators to

avoid lying, communicators often believe them to be ethical, despite the fact that recipients of these communication behaviors evaluate them as deceptive and ethically questionable (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020; Rogers & Norton, 2011).

In addition to using creative verbal tactics, communicators sometimes manipulate the honesty of their delivery through accompanying nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues, such as maintaining eye contact, exhibiting vocal fluency (e.g., continuity, smoothness, rate, and effort in speech production), using positive facial expressions (e.g., smiles), and engaging in dynamic hand gestures, influence the degree to which a message is perceived as honest (Burgoon, Blair, & Strom, 2008; Gardner, 2003). Dishonest content can still be perceived as honest if communicators' nonverbal delivery connotes confidence (Burgoon et al., 2008). Conversely, a communicator that tells the truth may be judged as dishonest if their nonverbal delivery signals anxiousness (Vrij, Granhag, & Porter, 2010). Verbal and nonverbal delivery strategies collectively influence recipients' understanding of information. To understand honesty in organizations, it is essential to understand when and why communicators employ these tactics, and how these behaviors influence communication recipients and organizational outcomes more broadly.

Voice, Silence, and Psychological Safety

There is a tremendous opportunity to integrate research on voice, silence, and psychological safety into the study of honesty. These topics were noticeably absent from the papers we reviewed because investigations of these topics have not been framed around "honesty." However, these constructs fall squarely within our broader conceptualization of honest behavior, as they all relate to whether information is disclosed versus withheld.

"Employee voice" refers to "informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change" (Morrison, 2014: 174). Interestingly, research on voice over the last several decades has predominantly focused on the predictors and outcomes of voice, with less focus on the content of the communication or the communication delivery (Morrison, 2014, 2023). This suggests parallels and complementarity between the honesty and voice literatures, with opportunities for integrating and deepening

both. For example, when an individual chooses to withhold a concern during a meeting and notes that they have no objection, even when asked for their opinion, they are manifesting silence while also engaging in dishonest disclosure. Our framework suggests that this behavior could be viewed as a lack of honest disclosure, or even an outright lie by confirming a falsehood (i.e., that they do not have a concern). We suggest that future research on honesty incorporate insights from the voice literature, and in particular from new work on ethical voice inside of organizations (Chen & Treviño, 2023).

Similar to the voice literature, the literature on "psychological safety"—"people's perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context such as a workplace" (Edmondson & Lei, 2014: 23)—is relevant to understanding when people will (or will not) decide to communicate truthful information (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Integrating insights from research on psychological safety into the study of honesty could help identify antecedents of truthfully and candidly sharing information and opinions. For example, research on psychological safety in intensive care unit rounding teams finds that inclusive leader behaviors by attending physicians are associated with team members (e.g., nurses, respiratory therapists, clinical pharmacists, physician trainees) feeling more comfortable discussing problems (Diabes et al., 2021). This work, along with other related research on psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018), emphasizes the importance of leadership, among other factors, for encouraging honest disclosure in teams and organizations. Our systematic review of the honesty literature identified surprisingly few papers investigating how leadership behaviors or organizational culture influence honesty, which suggests opportunities for future work to integrate insights from the psychological safety, voice, and silence literatures to identify the individual and organizational factors that make people more (vs. less) willing to truthfully and candidly disclose information and opinions.

Guilt and Moral Judgments

Communicators who lie must contend with threats to their self-image and guilt (Van Zant, Kennedy, & Kray, 2022). An open question is whether similar self-image threats and moral emotions arise when communicators deliberately shield themselves from truth or obscure the truth through means other than false statements. If not, are there ways to highlight the harms associated with failures of truth-seeking and fostering understanding so that people internalize

them, as they do failures of honest content, and consider the damage created by these other deviations from honesty?

Related to these questions, how should we evaluate others who perpetuate misinformation through failures of truth-seeking, belief-speaking, and fostering understanding? Recent work finds that people are deeply troubled when others hold false beliefs (Molnar & Loewenstein, 2020), suggesting that failures of truth-seeking may lead to social punishment. However, other ongoing work finds that, when misinformation is attributed to bias (incorrect beliefs, which reflect a failure of truth-seeking) rather than deception (which reflects a failure of belief-speaking), communicators are penalized less and more likely to be trusted in the future. For example, Wallace and Levine (2023) found that government leaders who give constituents false information about the success of a new health technology are penalized less and trusted more when constituents believe that the leaders actually (but incorrectly) believed the technology worked, compared to when constituents believe that the leaders knowingly lied about the technology. This work connects to research on "workplace bullshitting" (McCarthy, Hannah, Pitt, & McCarthy, 2020). Whereas liars knowingly and deliberately make false statements, "bullshitters" simply do not know or care about whether the statements they are making are true. Overall, more work is needed to understand precisely why and when communicators who hold false beliefs are penalized more or less than communicators who make false statements.

Comparing reactions to failures of belief-speaking and fostering understanding will also be fruitful. In the context of negotiations, lying is seen as less ethical, and leads to more negative interpersonal and economic outcomes, than acts that foster misunderstanding without lying (e.g., paltering; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020). These dynamics are also relevant to many organizational domains outside of negotiations. For example, it is commonplace to engage in cherry-picking when presenting data in a marketing context. Companies and salespeople routinely selectively present statistics, consumer reviews, or other information to give consumers falsely positive impressions of their products or services. However, these same companies and individuals likely stop short of actively fabricating information. Consistent with work on paltering, recent work suggests that cherry-picking is seen as more acceptable than fabrication (Duncan, Levine, & Small, 2023). Future work should examine the mechanisms underlying these

effects, as well as how these dynamics influence judicial decisions and consumer law more broadly.

Cultural Values and Norms

An unfortunate limitation of the extant honesty literature is the dearth of research on how cultural values and norms affect honesty. It is well established that culture influences communication, negotiation, and trust (Aslani et al., 2016; Brett & Mitchell, 2022; Gunia, Brett, & Nandkeolyar, 2014; Meyer, 2014; Ramirez-Marin, Olekalns, & Adair, 2019), so it is surprising that we have such a limited understanding of how culture affects honesty. Indian negotiators, for example, trust their counterparts considerably less than do U.S. negotiators (Gunia, Brett, Nandkeolyar, & Kamdar, 2011). Such cultural differences in trust are likely to influence how honest people are in their negotiations; however, there is not yet conclusive empirical evidence that this is indeed the case.

Several ambitious papers have reported data from numerous countries to provide insight into how honesty varies around the world (Cohn, Maréchal, Tannenbaum, & Zünd, 2019; Crittenden, Hanna, & Peterson, 2009; Gächter & Schulz, 2016; Hugh-Jones, 2016; Pascual-Ezama et al., 2015; Payan, Reardon, & McCorkle, 2010; Triandis et al., 2001). These papers have used diverse and creative methods to study honesty among people from very different cultural backgrounds. For example, Cohn and colleagues (2019) planted "lost wallets" with varying amounts of money in 40 countries across the globe, finding that, in nearly all countries, citizens were more likely to return wallets that contained more money. Though not the focus of their paper, their data showed that people in some parts of the world (e.g., Switzerland, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden) are considerably more likely to return lost wallets than are people in other parts of the world (e.g., China, Morocco, Peru, Kazakhstan, Kenya). While these country-level findings are intriguing, the overall body of work on how honesty varies by culture, and, more importantly, on why cultural differences might emerge, is far too preliminary and fragmented to offer firm conclusions.

Beyond national culture, honesty is also influenced by organizational culture (Cohn, Fehr, & Maréchal, 2014; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010). However, as with the research on national culture, the body of research on how honesty varies according to organizational culture is relatively thin. Accordingly, a particularly generative area for future research is to examine how and why each of the four facets of honest behavior described by our model vary across different organizational cultures and in different parts of the world.

CONCLUSIONS

We hope our systematic review and new multidimensional framework of honest behavior will alter the trajectory of research and practice in management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, business ethics, and related fields by motivating researchers to think more expansively about the topic of honesty. We view the identification of the critical roles of intellectual honesty, honest disclosure, and honest delivery in the honesty process as a key contribution of our review. Honesty is more than a binary decision of whether to lie versus tell the truth. We encourage researchers to broaden their focus beyond the accuracy of the content of the communication and allocate more research attention to intellectual honesty and communication behaviors that foster understanding of the truth in others via the way information is disclosed and delivered.

Our new multidimensional framework of honesty also has practical implications for those aiming to increase honesty in organizations. To encourage honesty in organizations, we need to do more than simply discourage lying or distorting facts. We also must consider how to encourage people to seek out truthful information, update their beliefs based on this information, and attempt to foster true beliefs in others. Managers should prioritize the communication of verified and truthful information to promote honesty and avoid the spread of misinformation. This can start at the individual level by implementing interventions to promote the search for accurate information. For example, interventions to increase attentiveness (Dannals et al., 2020) or to manipulate construal levels during information seeking (Shani et al., 2009) may help people evaluate their beliefs and seek out truthful information. Given that emotional discomfort and threatening situations can be barriers to intellectual honesty, creating a safe and inclusive environment in the workplace is likely to promote more commitment to truth-seeking. Additionally, organizations can train communicators to think of honesty as more than the absence of lies, and ensure they communicate in a manner that avoids creating a misleading impression in their targets. By identifying and labeling these largely underexplored components of honesty, we provide individuals and organizations with the outlines of a road map to become more honest.

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Binyamin Cooper (bcoop@cmu.edu) is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University. He received his PhD in management from the University of Florida. His research considers workplace mistreatment, honesty, and resilience, and seeks to understand how specific forms of communication can be harmful or helpful in navigating difficult conversations.

Taya R Cohen (tcohen@cmu.edu) is an associate professor of organizational behavior and business ethics at the Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University. She received her PhD in social psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on honesty, ethical behavior, moral character, negotiation, and conflict management.

Elizabeth Huppert (elizabeth.huppert@kellogg.northwestern. edu) is a postdoctoral fellow at the Dispute Resolution Research Center at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University. She received her PhD in psychology and business from the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on moral psychology and behavioral ethics.

Emma E. Levine (emma.levine@chicagobooth.edu) is an associate professor of behavioral science and the Charles E. Merrill faculty scholar at the Booth School of Business, University of Chicago. She received her PhD in decision processes from the University of Pennsylvania. Emma investigates the psychology of altruism, trust, and ethical dilemmas.

William Fleeson (fleesonw@wfu.edu) is the Hultquist Family professor of psychology at the Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University. He received his PhD in psychology from the University of Michigan. His work focuses on the morally exceptional and on examining actual behavior, behavior patterns, and behavior contingencies.

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APPENDIX: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Our review process was informed by recent examples in *Academy of Management Annals* (e.g., Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018; Kleshinski, Wilson, Stevenson-Street, & Scott, 2021; Lazar, Miron-Spektor, Agarwal, Erez, Goldfarb, & Chen, 2020; Maddux, Lu, Affinito, & Galinsky, 2021; Park, Park, & Barry, 2022; Yip & Fisher, 2022) and recommendations regarding best practices in conducting systematic reviews (Kooij, Kanfer, Betts, & Rudolph, 2018; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).
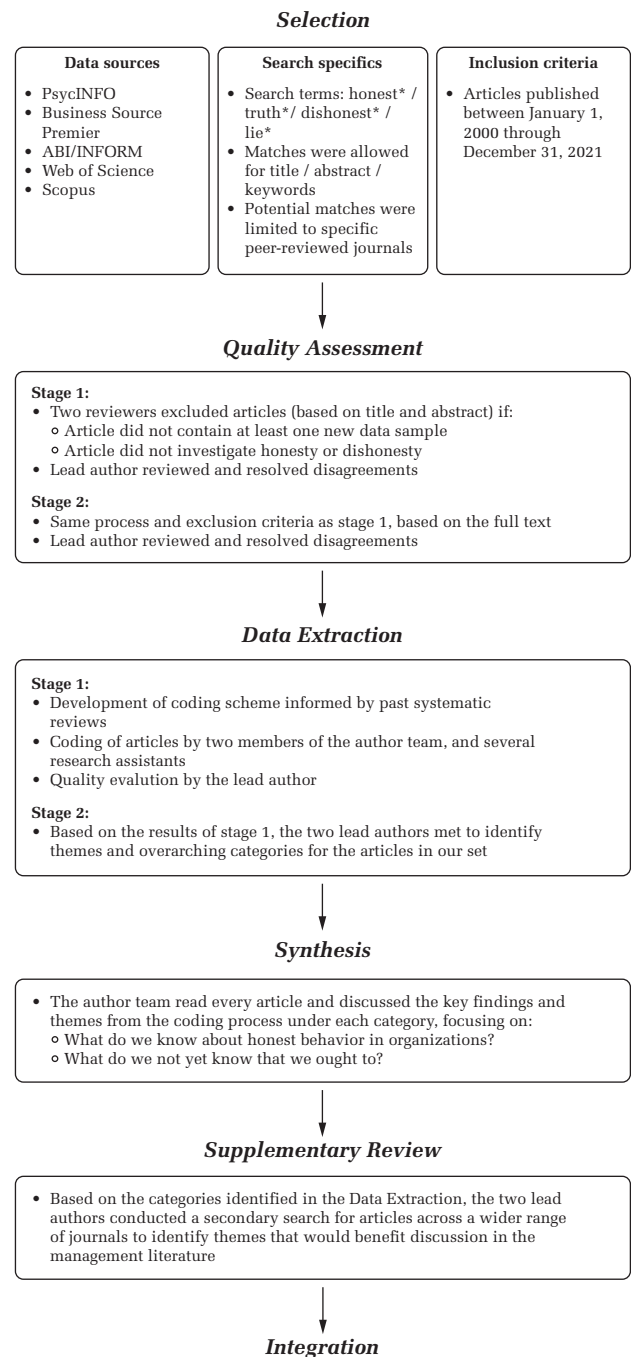
In the article selection phase of our systematic review, we identified articles through a broad bibliographic search in five databases (PsycINFO, Business Source Premier, ABI/INFORM, Web of Science, Scopus) using the search terms *honest** OR *truth**

OR *dishonest** OR *lie**, where "*" indicates a term that matches the stem before the asterisk (e.g., *truthfulness* will be identified as a match to the stem of *truth**). To maximize the relevance of our review to management and organizations, as opposed to other domains, we focused our review on identifying empirical research reported in journals on the *Financial Times* 50 list in the areas of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, business ethics, or human resource management. These journals were *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Management Science*, *Organization Studies*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Organization Science*. We supplemented this list by also searching for empirical research in three related journals that publish similar work: *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and *Personnel Psychology*.

During the quality assessment phase, we excluded articles that (a) that did not contain a study with at least one novel sample (i.e., articles that were not empirical, such as theory papers, book reviews, etc.) or (b) did not investigate honesty or dishonesty, despite being identified by our search. This latter set of exclusions contained articles in which the search terms were used in other ways, with phrases such as "these important *truth*s are …", or "knowledge *lies* in its focus …." The outcome of the quality assessment phase was a final set of 169 articles, detailed below.

Next, we reviewed and coded each of these 169 articles during the data extraction phase. The goal of this process was to gather information about how honesty has been studied, and the key themes and findings in this body of work. Coding of the articles was an iterative process that evolved over time as our new framework of honest behavior emerged. As such, each paper was evaluated by multiple members of the research team at different points in the process. Among other information, each of the 169 articles was coded for how honesty was conceptualized and operationalized. The coding process, along with the synthesis-oriented discussions that we engaged in over the course of this process, resulted in the identification of four facets of honest behavior: (a) the accuracy of the content a communicator shares ("honest content"), (b) the amount and depth of disclosure by the communicator ("honest disclosure"), (c) the manner in which a communicator shares or discloses ("honest delivery"), and (d) the way a

FIGURE A1
Systematic Review Process

Selection

Data sources	Search specifics	Inclusion criteria
• PsycINFO • Business Source Premier • ABI/INFORM • Web of Science • Scopus	• Search terms: honest* / truth*/ dishonest* / lie* • Matches were allowed for title / abstract / keywords • Potential matches were limited to specific peer-reviewed journals	• Articles published between January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2021

Quality Assessment

Stage 1:
• Two reviewers excluded articles (based on title and abstract) if:
  ◦ Article did not contain at least one new data sample
  ◦ Article did not investigate honesty or dishonesty
• Lead author reviewed and resolved disagreements

Stage 2:
• Same process and exclusion criteria as stage 1, based on the full text
• Lead author reviewed and resolved disagreements

Data Extraction

Stage 1:
• Development of coding scheme informed by past systematic reviews
• Coding of articles by two members of the author team, and several research assistants
• Quality evaluation by the lead author

Stage 2:
• Based on the results of stage 1, the two lead authors met to identify themes and overarching categories for the articles in our set

Synthesis

• The author team read every article and discussed the key findings and themes from the coding process under each category, focusing on:
  ◦ What do we know about honest behavior in organizations?
  ◦ What do we not yet know that we ought to?

Supplementary Review

• Based on the categories identified in the Data Extraction, the two lead authors conducted a secondary search for articles across a wider range of journals to identify themes that would benefit discussion in the management literature

Integration

communicator develops, validates, and updates their beliefs ("intellectual honesty"). The four different approaches to the study of honesty revealed by our review helps us address questions about what constitutes honest behavior. Our criteria for coding any one

paper in a category was for there to be any evidence in the paper—be it conceptual, theoretical, or empirical—for one or more of our identified categories. We did not limit ourselves to the labels provided by the authors of each paper; rather, we considered how concepts were discussed in the articles and how variables were operationalized in the empirical studies.

During the synthesis stage of the systematic review, the author team met regularly to discuss key findings and insights from the results of the review.

Additionally, during this stage, the two lead authors conducted a supplementary review, using three of the four facets of honest behavior as search terms, and without restricting results to a specific set of journals. Specifically, the search terms were "honest disclosure," "honest delivery," and "intellectual honesty." The goal of this stage was to identify themes that would not have been captured by the initial literature search, and that could contribute to the discussion of honest behavior.