INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR

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Do Hierarchies Generate Moral Decisions?

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of hierarchical structures on individual and collective decision-making in morally relevant contexts. Using a laboratory experiment based on a modified deception game, we compare group decisions under hierarchical and egalitarian frameworks. Building on the theoretical insights of Rothenhäusler, Schweizer, and Szech (2018), we examine how responsibility concentration within hierarchies shapes moral behavior. While prior literature often associates hierarchy with the facilitation of collective goods provision, it has also been linked to unethical behavior. Our findings highlight a more nuanced perspective: hierarchical structures reduce the prevalence of immoral decisions, particularly when responsibility is concentrated on pivotal decision-makers. These results offer insights into organizational design that balances efficiency with ethical accountability.