

INTEGRATION THROUGH INTEGRITY: HOW ETHICS COULD SERVE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to separate between management and ethical issues within an organization, be it public or private. It pertains more to fundamental than to applicative research and the hypothesis is as follows: organizational culture has a lot in common with both management policies and organizational ethics, but trying to mix the last two results not only in unfitted solutions, but also in harmful ones; the only way in which ethics could serve management strategies and organizational culture is to provide the company with ethical solutions to ethical problems. Management problems always have an ethical side, for the handling of which ethical counselling is in order; other approaches for ethical issues are useless and potentially harmful. Therefore, when ethics and good conduct are at stake, it is integrity and its power to support groups that concerns managers, and not only the maximization of profits.

KEYWORDS: *culture, ethics, integration, integrity, organization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a fact, which needs no further arguments, that ethics represents the ultimate layer of relationships among humans – other details aside. All other types of relationships seem to rely upon a certain fundamental manner of interacting with other fellow human beings. All other manmade structures (society, economy, culture, etc.) have ethics as a solid ground – since ethics is, in a way, a general approach onto human conduct, behavior and action. Other fields of activity provide humans with certain and specific objects, which fill up the a priori structure designed by morality. This goes also for economy, business and management, optimization of profit playing the role of objective at this point.

The main objective for the present paper is to provide a set of specific criteria to distinguish, within an organization, between managerial and ethical issue, or at least to establish the most effective method a decision maker – i. e. manager – could use in order to find such a system of criteria. Secondly, it seems important for a manager to be aware of the fact that ethical issues accept only ethical approaches and issues – otherwise things remain untouched or could even get worse (Hackett, 2003, p. 135 sqq). Thirdly, the most important resource of an organization – the human resource – should be selected considering both efficiency indicators (competences, experience, skills, etc.) and moral determinants, precisely in order to serve the main goal of it, i. e. objectives reaching.

Mainstream research in organizational culture takes ethics as a tool to be used by managers in decision making, branding or societal issues. Still, failing to provide an adequate role for ethics

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within an organization – the lack of values within an organization being lethal (Immelt, 2003, p. 111) – is similar to ignoring the fundamental nature of it, when it comes to relationships among human beings. This could lead to difficult problems that are not revealed as such until they have widespread effects for which solutions are not easy to find. A prudent ethical attitude of managers would be to identify on time ethical issues and to understand that ethical approaches have effects on the medium and long run, provided that building up organizational culture (together with its ethical bias) is a continuous and rather long process. Since important authors seem to believe that it is all about constructing the organization and making it grow, sound moral principles could offer the background for long term policies and sustainable development.

What moral tools could provide for the management is integration through integrity. All human associations seem to reunite together people who are following a mutual benefit. At the same time, people with mutual moral values, norms, and principles are very likely to find mutual interests and also avoid selfish acts. For organizations that want to create brands, this seems to be the magical solution – integration of individual goals into organization's objective.

2. INTEGRITY – HELP OR HINDRANCE?

It is a long-lasting debate among organizational ethics experts whether morality is a hindrance for obtaining and optimizing profit or not (some authors believe that performance without morality fails in the long run – Thakor, 2003, p. 125 sqq). At a first glance, ethics seems to provide the organization with a set of values, norms, principles, and laws that are simply adding up with the legal and administrative ones. Therefore, a legitimate question could arise: why does the management need more factors that bring about the risk of making profits more difficult to obtain? At a first glance, ethics seems to be a hindrance – still, it is quite easy to prove that it offers the ultimate layer of human binding, without which not only profits, but also the existence of a human association (organization) could be in jeopardy. Furthermore, among moral values, it is integrity – a structural value of all morality systems, that expresses the possible merger between human conduct and the ideality of moral values, since it refers to the capacity of the human being to remain intact no matter the corruption factors that could arise during her/his life – the very concept that provides the organization with a double-sided tool: morally intact individuals and a possible holistic perspective onto the organization (i. e. integration of individual goals into general objectives – Gebler, 2012, p. 91 sqq).

Defining integrity as a moral value and also as a tool for managers is quite debatable (Brown, 2005, p. 4 sqq; Marchica, 2004, p. 30-31). All other nuances aside, the very specific difference for integrity has to do with the inner capacity of the conscious individual of proving resilience – whenever a corrupting factor arises. By no means could integrity be a merely legal issue – since a person could respect all laws, but still remain intimately corrupted. It seems that, no matter how hard one tries to adopt a completely legalist perspective onto morality, integrity will remain unreachable for legalist thinking. It seems to be an inner side of the moral subject, which cannot ultimately be reached by any outer authority – most of all because of the fact that an inner corrupted moral subject can display a legally unquestionable conduct.

What is, then, the use of integrity and integrity promoting policies? At first, lack of integrity or corruption leads to extreme individualism or radical egoism. Reliability – another important moral attitude – proves to be a fundamental moral ingredient of managerial decisions – since management is mainly about commissioning or deputing duties. Placing power into the hands of an inappropriate person – one who is dominated by greed, will of power a. s. o. – seems to be the worst thing to do, at least for an organization, which is supposed to aim towards a mutual benefit of its members. Secondly, carrying out duties is a thing of good intention – therefore efficiency and effectiveness seem to find a moral foundation in integrity, since a morally incorruptible person could hardly find reasons to do badly on the job.

Still, all these do not provide managers with a strong foundation for supporting the idea that ethics is more like a help than a hindrance.

It is the generative side of ethics that does the job. A clear distinction between ethics, on the one side, and administration and law, on the other side, is further needed. First of all, ethics is concerned with educating will for action, and only as a side and extreme effect, with punishment. All systems of morality tell people what they ought to do and, most of all, why they should do it. It is this proactive side of ethics that stands in the front line. Secondly, laws are meant, basically, to draw some lines or borders among people and institutions, in order to clarify just how far a person's or institution's action could reach. If ethics is „the engine”, then law is „the brake”. Thirdly, management strategies and policies have a technical nature, they seem to be comparable with hypothetical imperatives, leaving untouched the categorical ones: if A wants to do so-and-so, then A has to do so-and-so. They are meant to obtain and optimize profits, but never to answer the question regarding the reasons of doing so.

Under these circumstances, integrity proves to be of a real help for the managerial action, since it certainly represents the ground on which a categorical imperative could grow. If well defined, integrity is about why A should do so-and-so – meaning that so-and-so is a good objective to reach and A must desire to obtain it. Secondly, integrity is a property of human conscience – therefore, an inner impulse to act – while laws are external restraints; of course, on the third place come managerial tools, which are technical.

From a moral point of view, all managerial strategies and policies have just one goal, already stated: gain and optimize profits. Integrity ensures that a moral subject (be it a person or an organization) takes upon herself/himself this objective as being good and refuses all corruption, i. e. all factors that could lead to the abandonment of the good objective. Integrity makes a moral subject never to quit good moral values and the objectives that spring from them, and under no circumstances never to lose reliability.

3. ETHICAL AND MANAGERIAL PROBLEMS

First and foremost, the difference between ethical and managerial problems seems to be a technical one. While management strategies and policies must be in such a way build up so to provide de organization with the capacity both of anticipating problems and also solving them as they appear, ethics seems to have a limited and, in some cases, no capacity of solving problems as they rise. It is a question of time, as management has to cover short, medium and long terms. Ethics needs time to educate conscience – punishment being just a last minute solution. When ethical issues rise, they must have been generated some time ago. In order for ethical issues to be avoided, on the spot action is quite impossible – as it takes time to make a person act with integrity and reliability. On the contrary, no matter how anticipative management could be, quite a few of the problems that come up were never anticipated – therefore managers should solve them as they appear.

Secondly, ethics provides reasons why a certain action should be undertaken or a certain goal should be followed, while management strategies and policies offer methods how to do the same. Their connection, as previously mentioned, is the hypothetical nature of management actions – the „if... then...” structure. Ethics – at least when it comes to values – has an obvious categorical nature – the „should” or „ought to” structure. Establishing objectives is the main task for a manager, and the first restraint should be related to their reachable character. Secondly, the objectives should be morally validated – and also the methods. Morally questionable objectives are likely to draw morally questionable persons – while morally good objectives seem to draw people with integrity and reliability. Let this be noted: by no means are situations like win-lose or lose-win *per se* morally questionable. On the contrary, refusing to reward a person's merits is morally questionable. Be it deontological or teleological, i. e. supporting either the goals as such or the methods to reach them, ethics requires fairness.

Thirdly, ethical issues address people, while management issues deal with resources (human, also). Most of the resources are assets. It is ethics that makes the difference between human resources and other resources, between assets and people. Assets as such lack objectives and can be treated as such – of course, misuse or destruction of assets can become an ethical problem, but only because the resources are no longer available in order to do good. On the other hand, people have goals of their own, that are to be integrated into the organizations' objectives. It seems legitimate for a person to require her/his individual goal be taken into account when the organization's objectives are stated – this being the moral foundation for all types of personnel motivation. All resources have potential – human resources also have an impulse of their own. Within an organization one cannot ignore individual objectives, due to ethical reasons.

Last but not least, ethical issues have to do with good intentions. No matter how well managers build up structures, the system moves if and only if it is continuously inserted with impulse. There are two restraints: the impulse should be of a good quality – integrity of people; impulses must converge or must be made convergent without pressure or force. A functional system – be it almost perfect – cannot last unless these two moral requirements are met. Enlightened self-interest – probably, the most generous moral attitude – requires integrity and integration, since mutual interests cannot be followed unless a minimum cooperation among moral agents exists.

4. ETHICAL SOLUTIONS

Briefly, the ethical way of the contemporary manager could be stated as follows: organizational culture based on the culture of moral integrity and by means of moral integration.

For more detailed solutions, the nature of the issue is relevant. Still, generally speaking, ethical solutions are meant to be considered on the long run and they are destined more to create trends, than to solve specific problems. Secondly, ethical approaches and ethical programs aims towards avoiding future issues, and just secondly to solve present ones.

To be more precise, one must start from the fact that ethical solutions refer – either directly, or indirectly – to human resources issues. Even issues like protecting the environment, animal treatment a. s. o. refer to the human repugnance face to and rejection of destruction, violence, etc. (which is particular to human being – it is quite easy to see that the laws of nature are, most of the time, ruthless).

There are three relevant things, which a manager should take into account, from a moral point of view: testing, implementation, and example.

Testing ethics and integrity requires, at first, experts in applied ethics. Ethical survey should be conducted repeatedly and after reasonable periods of time or in order to see the results of some ethical policies. It must be noted that ethical testing is almost completely different from other types of testing. Morality needs to be tested simply because oral commitments have a natural tendency to loosen up, unless there is a recurrent intervention from the moral agency. Still, the most important moment to test morality is when hiring a person – hiring policies should always have a moral side (Georgescu, 2018, p. 5 sqq). Prevention policies seem to meet the ethical requirement, provided that, from a moral point of view, it is easier and better to prevent misconduct than to educate. Furthermore, it is compatibility of human beings in question – finding the best solutions here being a guarantee that future issue will not arise.

Secondly, since there is a natural tendency of loosening morality in the absence of moral agency, and, besides, some moral values and rules could be lacking from the beginning in an organization, implementing ethical programs is recommended. Besides experts in applied ethics, this requires a special strategy of managing ethics. At first, managers must prepare for reluctant attitudes from employees, either openly admitted or hidden. Secondly, a merger between the economic imperative of gaining and optimizing profit and social responsibility is always in order. In this case, personnel integration policies could help. Thirdly, ethics implementing policies are to be conducted

throughout time, results being evaluated periodically. Last but not least, measurable results are unlikely to occur – qualitative methods of evaluating results being more suitable.

Finally, managers should always act like role models in order to have the necessary credentials to implement ethical programs. Managers' integrity is, beyond any reasonable doubt, the ethical method – provided that integration policies require that managers be voluntarily followed by employees. Therefore, there is always in question a social status of managers, and also a certain group recognition. Furthermore, since managers represent, above all, the organization, then it is a moral duty for them to take upon themselves the objectives and the values of that organization (in fact, this should be the case for all employees, be the organization public or private; see Hamlin, 2005, p. 264, *passim*). A moral manager is immediately followed, this being a favorable fact that could support integration. Furthermore, within an organization one must pay attention to and express the idea that only win-win and lose-lose cases are to be considered.

As a corollary, a moral manager must set up an ethical strategy for conflicts. Usually, conflicts spring from a different perspective regarding the way benefits should be distributed within an organization – be it public or private. This seemingly economic dispute has, in fact, moral roots – it is all about how people define fairness. The moral lesson is that managers should not allow things to get too far, by means of prevention policies. A strategy of integrating, within an organization, people of integrity could be the best solution.

5. BENEFITS OF MANAGING INTEGRITY

Convergence of moral values and principles ensures the adequate ground for economic growth. A moral working environment ensures also competition for the benefits of individuals and of the organization, together with the willingness to recognize and reward merits. Managerial action is to benefit from people of integrity, since delegating tasks becomes easier, as employees are motivated by good intentions, not only by material benefits. Note that material benefits cannot be excluded, and moral management should be also concerned with distributing benefits as well as loss, following the same principles.

Sustainability could benefit from integrity, since integrating moral people serves the cause of setting up a compact and tight team. Moreover, moral thinking is always concerned with avoiding evil at all costs and on the long run. Therefore, ethical concern for the future provides a structure of thinking and attitude that can serve sustainability. Furthermore, moral agency assumes respect both for own integrity and for the environment in which the organization exists.

Further research on the topic could add some other issues, as environment protection, social policies, cultural policies, crisis policies, scarcity of goods and services policies a. s. o.

6. CONCLUSION

It seems more and more like a given fact organizations' turn towards their social status, without leaving aside the concern for gaining and optimizing profit. Integrity and integration policies could as well function at higher and higher levels, ensuring a sound and proper business environment. Moreover, the concept of optimization of benefits could replace the eager race for maximization of profits. Reasonably limiting profits and trust – obtained through integrity and familiarization generated by integration – might prove to be the moral answer to continuous conflict on the market. Besides, integrity and morality could even help those who lose competition to turn to themselves and accept responsibility for this fact. It is very likely that this could turn business environment into a place for improvement, rather than a war zone.

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