

BUSINESS ETHICS: THE ROLE OF EMOTION

MRITTIKA CHATTERJEE

Jadavpur University

ABSTRACT

The essence of any business organization is its human resource. The undeniable importance of intercommunication among the employees and the massive competition among the workers calls for business ethics. We cannot dismiss the fact that humans are contained with emotions. Though, emotions are said to cover a disputed territory and considered as anti-ethical, this aims to show the importance of certain emotions that are to be included among the ethical norms which will serve as a support to the survival and flourishing of the organization.

Ethics is concerned with moral judgments whereby individual human conduct and decisions can be evaluated as morally right/wrong, good/bad, just/unjust. Moral philosophers provide us with different norms or standards for this. In the domain of business, moral strategies and codes are important to set the framework for a particular organization, to plan and make policies for the operations of the organization in order to ensure ethical values related to all the stakeholders of the business. Integrity, trustworthiness, fairness, concern are few of the many other moral values that are integral for the functioning of a business organization.

The world has limited resources, but it has an increasing population. Without ethics, these resources are being used up for solely individual benefit at a tremendous cost to both the present and future generations. An establishment that is known to be motivated by moral principles is valued in society, even by those who may not have information about the business organization. Decisions, both in individual realm and in the realm of business should be driven by values or else it might lead to unfair consequences. For example an organization that does not value fair competition will be fierce in its operations aiming to wipe out its competitors and establish monopoly in the market.

Business ethics is important for managing a sustainable business mainly because of the serious consequences that can result from the decisions made, with the lack of regard to ethics. Even if one believes that good business ethics does not contribute to profit levels, one should be able to recognize that poor ethics can have a detrimental effect on the base in the long term.

Thus, the main aim is to make the correct decision in a practical situation, involving an ethical dilemma. It is an approach of identifying and resolving issues in the professional context. It is an art of evaluating and choosing among the alternatives in a manner that is consistent with the ethical values, applicable in that particular practical circumstance. It is important to eliminate the 'unethical' and choose what is 'right' in that situation.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a theory on motivation based on universal human needs, which are often adopted by business organizations. Maslow believed that each individual has a hierarchy of needs, consisting of physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization requirements. Maslow (1943, 1954) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others.

- *The physiological needs* are biological requirements for human survival, for example, air, food, water shelter etc.
- Once an individual's physiological needs are satisfied the *needs for security and safety* become salient.
- The third level of human needs is social and involves *feelings of belongingness*.
- At the fourth level is the *need of esteem*, which can be classified into two categories-esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, independence etc) and desire for reputation or respect from others (status, prestige etc)
- *Self-actualization* need is the highest level, which refers to the person's potential, self fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.

It is important to note that Maslow's (1943, 1954) five-stage model has been expanded to include *cognitive* and *aesthetic needs* (Maslow 1970) and later *needs of transcendence*.

Business organizations, accepting Maslow's ideas, may facilitate employee motivation by modifying organizational and managerial practices to increase the likelihood that employees will meet all levels of needs.

Emotions have not received much attention in mainstream dominant theories of ethics, and this is also true for business ethics. The category of emotions covers a disputed territory, commonly thought of as anti-ethical to reason, disorienting and distorting practical thought. However, there is also a sense in which emotions are factors in practical reasoning, understood broadly as justifying that issue in action. At the very least, emotion can function as *enabling causes* decision making, insofar as they direct attention towards certain objects of thought away from others. In this paper we shall focus on certain emotions which are relevant for human attitudes and judgments which help in ethical function of business enterprise, along with providing a humanistic model to the organizations.

Everyone agrees that professional-ethical decisions, often involving matters of intercommunication, bonding and professional loyalties do arouse emotional responses. What is not agreed upon is whether or how one should weigh emotion when trying to resolve an ethical dilemma. Emotion is often considered non-essential aspect to the ethical decision process that is best ignored if not controlled as it interferes with logical, rational, ethical decision process. A completely rationalistic view dismisses the role of emotions with the assertion that, arguments are one thing, sentiments another and nothing fogs the mind as thoroughly as emotion. Other philosophers may hesitantly admit the inevitability of emotions or gut feelings in moral argumentation but vigorously resist employing them. As James Rachels put it, "the idea cannot be to avoid reliance on unsupported 'sentiments'- that is impossible. The idea is always to be suspicious of them, and to rely on as few as possible, only after examining them critically, and only after pushing the arguments and explanations as far as they will go without them".

Following Charles Darwin's lead, psychological theorists now see emotions as cognitive capacities to have been selected through evolution to ensure the survival of individuals and of groups. Emotions are emerging and adaptive, serving communication, bonding and motivational functions. As human beings, we are equipped with evolved emotional and cognitive capacities that operate inter-activity. The existence of complex subsystems in human operations, both in personal and professional lives, seems an overall advantage. One system can always serve as a corrective to other. Emotions and reasoning are inner, complementary, synergistic, constantly blending and interacting as a person function.

In any professional engagement, we are often faced with different kinds of distractions in the path of choosing the correct action. Emotions energize the ethical quest. A person must care enough to discover the truth and it is often found out that a person who wrestles with moral questions are usually more committed to doing well and avoiding the evil. The specificity of moral thinking, what gives its imperative 'oughtness' is personal emotional investment. When emotions infuse with evaluative judgments, it is transformed into a prescriptive moral judgment of what ought to be done.

The working model of moral conflict has always been that of emotion opposing against reason with reasons' mastery, offering trustworthy guidance. However, a complete devotion to rationality in the process of decision making may create the difficulty of identifying and assessing the less dramatic but equally disabling disorders consisting of deficits of emotion. In our fast-pacing culture, the greatest threat is not sentimentality but the devaluation of feelings and not nurturing our moral emotions. Numbness, isolated disassociation between thinking and feeling is the warning signal as they usually result in moral collapse.

The organization is a social system composed of many interacting parts. Often the workers do not interact as individuals, but as members of a group. The groups play an important role in determining the attitudes and performances of the individual workers. Hence, communication is necessary to know the sentiments of the employees in the organization. The humans are diversely influenced and socio-psychological factors act as powerful motivators. An organization is nothing without its human resources. People are the essential ingredients in any organization, be it marketing, social, governmental or religious. What make human beings different from a mere machine is that we possess emotions and also have the capability to react upon them and take decisions.

Organizations are not only formed by the people; it is also for the people. Thus, a business organization must be responsible towards the society and the entire ecosystem as a whole. *Empathy* is an emotional process with substantial implications for moral behavior. Current conceptualizations of empathy integrate both affective and cognitive components. To define empathy, it is a “shared emotional response between an observer and a stimulus person.” empathic responsiveness requires three interrelated skills or capacities: (a) the cognitive ability to take another person’s perspective, (b) the cognitive ability to accurately recognize and discriminate another person’s affective experience, and (c) the affective ability to personally experience a range of emotions (since empathy involves sharing another person’s emotional experience). *Sympathy* is a feeling of support or agreement. It is an expression of care for a person who is suffering or has any kind of problem. Sympathy is an action of showing understanding and kindness for someone or a particular situation. *Concern* for others arises when we consider them to be important. It is a desire for welfare and safety for the people cared. *Trust* being the foundation of any relationship and being a strong emotion, itself is essential in any professional relation. If a workplace is able to foster a strong sense of trust within their organization, they can see a number of benefits including increased productivity amongst staff, improved morale amongst employees and staff, the ability to work more effectively as a team, rather than individuals and reduce the time to make and discuss key issues as each individual trusts in the judgment and expertise of their colleagues.

Organizations consisting of human relations requires fellow-feeling. If we try to understand the term in the way it is defined, we may say, that in a single word it means togetherness. When we identify oneself with another, then there is likely to be more power in an opinion, more power in action, and more power in character.

Many moral revolutions have been initiated by empathy felt for previously excluded groups including slaves, women, handicapped, experimental subjects, patients etc. Novel emotional responses of sympathy have prompted a creative moral readjustment. The emotion of concern, defined minimally as the thoughtful interest with a predisposition of attachment, most aptly tutors reason. Trust not only induces concern and attention, minimizes fear and indifference but it also motivates the resistance necessary to withstand automatic dismissals. The experience of indignation has moved persons to call for a drastic revision of moral ideas. Sometimes one emotion can monitor and tutor another, fellow-feeling can neutralize many negative emotions such as selfishness and jealousy and being content in the success of someone. Empathy and sympathy can quell anger or mitigate contempt for a person’s moral lapse or betrayal. In a work-place, an employee must transform his/her failure, depression and apathy into active assertion or aspiration.

Borrowing from Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*, it can be said that at every level of human desire, the role of emotions cannot be ignored. As a matter of fact, even Aristotle said that self-actualization is forming the best-version of oneself which cannot happen without concern for one’s own. Aristotle also considered *Friendship* as one of the important virtues that must be cultivated because in friendship we grow together. Thus, it can be said that moral authority and persuasiveness arise from the emotional response to their goodness. A good person’s lifelong cultivation of appropriate emotions will help protect from the deformation of moral reasoning that afflict the immature, regressed or selfish person undergoing stress or conflict. This holistic understanding of the moral self in an organization is considerably broader than those represented in our empirical review. There are two primary reasons to consider a more holistic approach. First, differential effects in research findings exist across the “having” and “doing” side of the professional self. The “having” side—both the content and structures are multifaceted and dynamic and may have a certain global unity as well as domain-specific qualities. Understanding how these dimensions create differential effects requires examining how they implicate motivational and regulatory aspects of the “doing” side of the moral self. Second, there are recursive interactions between the “having” and “doing” sides of the moral self. Both self-motivation and self-regulation of the “doing” side involve complex cognitive, emotive, and evaluative processes that influence the “having” side of the professional self. This recursive functioning makes it somewhat artificial to separate the “having” side of who a person is from the “doing” side of how a person act.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Audi, R., & Audi, P. (Eds.). (1999). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy* (Vol. 584). Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
2. Buck, R. (1984). *The communication of emotion*. Guilford press.
3. Thagard, P. (2001). How to make decisions: coherence, emotion, and practical inference. *Varieties of practical inference*, 355-371.
4. Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason and the human brain*: Putnam. New York.
5. Dictionary, O. E. (1989). *Oxford english dictionary*. Simpson, JA & Weiner, ESC.
6. Maslow, A., & Lewis, K. J. (1987). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salenger Incorporated*, 14, 987.
7. Roughley, N., & Schramme, T. (Eds.). (2018). *Forms of Fellow Feeling*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Velasquez, M. G., & Velazquez, M. (2002). *Business ethics: Concepts and cases* (Vol. 111). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
9. Ross, D. (1956). *Aristotle: the Nicomachean ethics*.
10. Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2012). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 7th. New York.
11. Haidt, J. (2003). The moral emotions. *Handbook of affective sciences*, 11(2003), 852-870.