

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

On 9 Jul 2015, at 21:32, Prakash Sethi Prakash.Sethi@baruch.cuny.edu wrote:



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I would like to express my gratitude to be part of an important learning exercise. The experience was unprecedented within the sphere of my prior knowledge and has forced me to ask many more questions than I can find the answers on my own. With my academic and professional background in applied economics and its impact on corporate conduct, I was ill-prepared to grasp the importance of the “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world¹.” I am finding it a challenge to understand the linkages between “spirituality” that is embedded in the individual person, and how it might impact decision-making at the individual level as a person, and the same individual acting at the institutional level.

From my limited understanding, I view spirituality to be something ethereal. I can feel it and I am impelled to act on this feeling. However, I do not know as to the source of this feeling, and whether other people feel spirituality in the same way as I do, and if so, how do I know this to be true. Moreover, I do not know how my sense of spirituality- and its salience – would drive me to act in a certain manner, which might be different for other people who have been moved by their own sense of spirituality.

I feel that it would be more functional, if we were to find a moderating variable that connects spirituality to ethical business conduct. I would like to suggest that we consider “morality” as an operating construct that would link spirituality to rationalize the ethical underpinnings of business conduct. For example, we may all agree that certain decision is “morally acceptable or unacceptable” regardless its source in individually inspired spirituality. Therefore, morality would precede business ethics. In the real world, business ethics is a relative concept where a person/institution’s ethical construct is derived on some type of cost/benefit analysis taking into account varying needs of individuals and groups who would be impacted by such a decision. Morality, however, is an abstract notion whose validity is not subject to cost/benefit analysis. Therefore, my point of reference would be to ascertain whether a decision is morally right, in which case I would choose different modes of implementing it keeping in mind the conflicting interests of various parties who would be impacted by such a decision. Thus business ethics would be a second order of action which would follow the “morality” issue.

As an illustrative exercise, I have attached copies of three papers for your reference and use. The first paper on Wal-Mart addresses an issue of widespread behavior, which I would consider to be morally wrong, but which everyone has accepted due to its persistent repetition by a large number of individuals and companies, which to borrow Hannah Arendt represents “the banality of evil”. The two other papers present situations where ethical decision making is not taken to

¹ VUCA is an acronym used to describe or reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general conditions and situations.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volatility,_uncertainty,_complexity_and_ambiguity

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

enhance ethical values. Instead, ethical conduct is used to justify otherwise unethical (violation of the rules of competitive enterprise) behavior.

I earnestly hope that this rambling discussion would provoke additional thinking and dialogue among ourselves.

Warmest personal regards.
Prakash.

Am 22.07.2015 um 15:45 schrieb Mike Thompson



mthompson@ceibs.edu

Dear Prakash

I very much appreciate the time that you have taken to share your reflections following our recent SPES Institute Conference in Amsterdam. I value the fact that we can have a continuing dialogue amongst our Fellows on the essential ground of the SPES Institute. Apologies for my delayed response.

As a backdrop to the spirituality in management discourse, we observe the recent and huge growth of interest in mindfulness and self-awareness in management training programs. Indeed, my own company (GLO - Good Leaders Online) has found many ready HR clients for workshops based on heightening individual self-awareness and mindfulness applied to business challenges such as change management. I think HR managers are tasked with providing developmental solutions to gain operating efficiencies from high performing teams. The aim is to get teams who work collaboratively and honestly together and are aware of ego challenges in decision-making for the Common Good. For me, these are signs that the ‘field of spirituality’ has become more visible and more readily accepted as the hinterland to management development topics alongside the rational and skill-based development programs.

Spirituality and morality.

I think the question you raise of how spirituality might link ethical business conduct is one that could fire a conference on the subject and require some cases to illustrate. One hypothesis for research on this could be: Managers who hold a spiritual perspective on life are more ethical in their business conduct than those who do not hold a spiritual perspective. As you point out, it would be helpful if there were a moderating variable that connects spirituality to ethical business conduct. One test would be to substitute “morality” (sensitivity of right and wrong) for “spirituality” in sentences to explore to what extent the meanings overlap. Or logic test the idea: If I am spiritual I will be moral -> I am moral therefore I am spiritual? Further: Humankind has a sense of morality therefore humankind has a sense of spirituality? There seems to be a circularity in these arguments. In one sense spirituality is beyond definition and you

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

acknowledge this when you say you can feel it and can be impelled by it. I would add by saying that there is a transcendent quality / sense about spirituality in which the rational external world is actually framed within of one’s spiritual world / a spiritual discourse.

The discussion leads us back to the Humean dialectic of the Moral Sentiments v Reason and Smith’s Benevolence / “Sympathy” v Self Interest. So it’s not new. For me, our spirituality prompts discussion and intrigue in the nature of the Self (approached through Mindfulness etc.). The alternative to the ‘faith’ of spirituality is the faith that tells us that we are all *Homines economici*.

So, how may I in practice make links from spirituality and its motivations to management and the commercial competitive world? I make a very modest attempt in the attached chapter adapted from one of our previous conferences and approach spirituality through the idea of the Common Good. I suggest that even in big corporations (like Nestlé Nespresso) we can observe practices that (at least in their origination) were formed from a spiritual motivation:

- a contribution towards the Common Good is recognisable;
- a genuine commitment towards quality and excellence beyond the product alone;
- a cultivation of direct relationships with stakeholders beyond what is economically required, and,
- signs that trust is being fostered in relationships within the corporation and between the corporation and its stakeholders.

In short, a moderating variable that could link to ethical business conduct could be a commitment to the Common Good.

Thank you for your wonderful papers! Your account of Wal-Mart’s behaviours and duplicity makes me now view them as a corrupt and criminal company - I hope my conclusion is wrong. Your very thoughtful JBE paper raises questions about the pursuit of ideal markets resulting in the suppression of altruism, benevolence and a higher standard of ethics and corporate citizenship. It makes me glad that the perfect market is a theoretical ideal and not a practical reality - and, similarly that the ridiculous notion of shareholder maximisation is similarly theoretical and impractical.

Our conference made plain the links that exist between religious worldviews and spirituality and how, for example, the Franciscan approach of poverty, *minoritas* and fraternity can provide a faith-based framework for our spiritual sense. Thanks to Thomas and Markus for a very stimulating paper on this topic. I find that these discussions lead me back to Christian faith but we all have unique journeys to make in spirituality.

I appreciate your stimulus to us on this topic very much and I look forward to continuing our conversation when you visit London.

With warm regards

Mike

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Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

On 26 Jul 2015, at 16:18, Thomas Dienberg



th.dienberg@web.de wrote:

Dear Prakash,

your thoughts on spirituality, ethics and morality are very interesting - and also challenging!
Just a short comment:

My experience is the same: It is difficult to deal with spirituality, it seems to be a vague term, definitions are so different and there are so many of them. But in my opinion that is not due to the fact that the term is so vague or - as you call it - ethereal. It is due to the fact that so many groups and individuals nowadays are dealing with this term, and because of that it is watered-down.

Spirituality is more than mindfulness or individual self-awareness, it is more than an attitude or an individual choice. We do have a long tradition of theology dealing with spiritual aspects and spirituality (asceticism, mysticism, piety, resistance and social work/challenges) in Christian history.

For me essential terms and realities of every kind of spirituality, whether they are religion based or not, are:

- being grounded and connected
- being related and a life in relationship with myself, the other, the world and the, Unconditional* (that's for me the belief in a personal God)
- subsidiarity, solidarity and love/charity
- the basic attitude of contemplation

And that is much more than ‚ethical behavior‘ or ‚morality‘ as you suppose which could be a link between spirituality and the ethical dimension of running a business.

It is interconnected, of course!

But using the term ‚morality‘: wouldn't it be the same dilemma - what are the basic values of this ‚morality‘? Who does define them, so that we can say something is morally right or wrong? Isn't any definition of morality also related to a certain amount of subjectivity?

So why change the term, why not stick to the concept of spirituality - and that is not about right or wrong, it is about a life-style, about decision and change.

We (at our institute in Muenster/Germany) work with a definition, developed by the Dutch Carmelite Kees Waaijman and a few variations of his definition.

We define spirituality as: the ongoing transformation of a person in engaged and responsible relationships with oneself, the other, the world and the Unconditional (transcendent reality, personal God or...).

This definition, I think, is more than just being moral.

Spirituality is about the sources of ethics and morality, and it raises the questions:

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

- What is the basic/ground inspiration of your life and shapes your life?
- What is indispensable for your life?
- What are the sources of your moral and ethical behavior?
- How do you live relationships?

Of course spirituality is related at the individual level, but I think (my comment at the end about the economy of communion is part of it) it is not individualistic. It deals with the deepest inner self, and that is related to others, to the world, to ... because we are the "homini socialis".

In our (post)secular world people are not only looking and longing for morality, but for also and even more for spirituality, and that includes different parts of our life as I tried to explain.

How to deal with these topics and thoughts in business?

For me the best thing always is to ask questions, to confront the individuals with their inner longings and wishes (and everybody has them), then confronting them with some texts of our rich spiritual tradition (St. Francis, St. Benedict, the Desert Fathers, St. Teresa, St. Ignatius ...) - and I have to say, that this has never failed. The texts of our tradition are "far away", they raise questions because it is not our language anymore - but exactly this distance challenges, creates some nearness and leads the people to themselves and their way of running their businesses. So it is not about giving or presenting a codex of morality or ethical behavior, it is about dealing with your inner sources and questions. And that has to do with your work, with your whole life.

I recently talked with some professors at St. Thomas University in Minneapolis. We spoke about many things, one was the issue and challenge of community. And I was impressed by the aspect of the economy of communion. That is not about moral issues, it is not about an ethical codex. It is about being connected, living relationships, building community. Moral and ethical issues are the consequences.

5

And, Mike, I appreciate your comments on the thoughts of Prakash very much, also the notion of Franciscan Spirituality, but that is different than just talking about the Common Good. It is certainly part of it and refers to the aspect of solidarity and social responsibility. But in my opinion spirituality deals with the greater picture answering the question: What does it mean to be a human being?

And is really every business run by a ‚certain spiritus‘, referring to spirituality in the sense we talked about it in Amsterdam? And if I am spiritual, am I automatically moral? That raises the question and issue of the discernment of the spirit that has a very old tradition in our Christian History - and is full of good and helpful advices (as Luk showed in his great talk in Amsterdam)! There you find a very concrete scale of measurement about („right and wrong/misunderstood“) spirituality!

I would like to get into discussions about these issues - and of course I have to defend ‚spirituality‘. I am a professor of Theology of Spirituality, not an economist.

And by the way: I really think that the Franciscan perspective can help us a lot. St. Francis lived in a world not that far away from us, although there are 800 years between us: "early industrialization", the reign of money and capitalism, urbanization, great poverty and a big divide between the rich and the poor.

I wish you all the best, looking forward to our discussions,
with warm regards from Atlanta,

Thomas

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

From: Mike Thompson : mikejthompson@me.com **Sent:** Tuesday, July 28, 2015 8:42 AM
To: Thomas Dienberg; Prakash Sethi - Cc: Raf Adams

Subject: Re: papers

Dear Thomas

Thank you for your very enlightening response - you have captured spirituality in a way that resonates for me and I think the questions you pose to people searching for meaning are powerful. I have learnt more by your thoughts.

I think Prakash, like many of us, is seeking to find a means of direct connection to motivations that are not explained in rational economic terms. But I agree spirituality is not to be confused by particular expressions. Indeed morality is personal and based on one's own values and business ethics is the external world of managing dilemmas and conflicts within concepts of justice to find solutions that sit well with all. But I have found the language of morality and wisdom does help people make connections with the ideas encompassed by "subsidiarity, solidarity and love/charity".

I have taken the liberty of sharing this exchange with my friend Raf. Adams (creator of 'The Suited Monk') who has made an impact with his approach to spirituality in the business world. He loved your insights and so I am cc-ing him in on this response by way of an introduction.

With warm regards from the Marches of England/Wales!

Mike

6

On 28 Jul 2015, at 14:32, Prakash Sethi Prakash.Sethi@baruch.cuny.edu wrote:

Dear Mike and Thomas:

Thank you for very thoughtful comments. Clearly, my understanding of “spirituality qua spirituality” is grossly inadequate both as to its source, e.g., religion, and implications in practices. And yet, I concede that as human beings we make decisions that could be considered “non-rational” in economic terms and yet would be perfectly logical to the individual based on his/her convictions, however defined.

However, when it comes to business or economic decisions, my concern can be briefly defined as follows: To wit, why is it that individuals make essentially similar unethical or socially irresponsible choices when their religious orientations or spiritual convictions emanate from widely divergent sources, e.g., religions. Put it another way, I would like to examine that reasons that would explain similarity in economic decision-making on the part of individuals qua individuals and individuals as corporate executives, when their religious beliefs are starkly different.

Needless to say, I am very anxious to learn from thought leaders like yourselves and gain better understanding of my dilemmas. I earnestly hope that we would continue with this dialogue.

Best regards.

Prakash

PS: I have taken the liberty of attaching some documents to give you a better idea as to my academic and professional background.

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

Am 29.07.2015 um 18:52 schrieb Mike Thompson <mikejthompson@me.com>:

Dear Prakash

A challenging question and again 'pulls' spirituality into the realm of business ethics. Would the classical Homo economicus answer be to highlight self-interest as the over-riding motivation to all human behaviour such that religious beliefs are pushed aside by the ego? If there are possible unethical and irresponsible social practices in the wake of self-interested (selfish?) practices then a person might restrain irresponsible economic decision-making in proportion to the risk of being found out and the nature of the likely penalty - self-interested restraint.

The question you raise brings to mind Albert Carr's locus classicus HBR article: "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?" (Jan-Feb 1968). Carr says that moral sentiments operate only in the private realm for business people: "in their office lives they cease to be private citizens, they become game players..." Carr's narrative compares economic decision-making to bluffing in poker: "Cunning deception and concealment of one's strength and intentions, not kindness and openheartedness, are vital in poker." His account illustrates the duality implicit in your observation: "individuals qua individuals and individuals as corporate executives". Carr essentially says we are a Suit at work and a Monk in our private life. The Suit will perform and compete in the external world for whatever material gains are possible with no apparent conscience. But I don't think this is true. And I don't think that Adam Smith would like Carr's economics and duplicitous norms either. Smith was the proto behavioural economist emphasising the moral sentiments and especially the sense of sympathy that can be felt by a person seeing the plight of another human being even when they have no direct relationship with the other.

I think that religions, when practiced with faith, and not by cultural ritual alone, do enable people's conscience to become more sharpened and sensitive to "sympathy" and justice in their behaviours and economic decision-making. When we observe similar economic (unethical?) decisions being made by people of different religious beliefs I think that what we observe is simply raw self-centred humanity with religious belief as an accoutrement of culture rather than as a meaningful and sense/values-guiding compass to practice the common good. After all giving to the common good reduces my personal utility.

Religions tend to give us accounts of duality in their anthropologies and soteriologies:

Buddhism	non-self	the self
Hindu-Vedantic	spirit-self	ego-self
Christian	spirit / inner man	flesh / outer man
Hinduism	higher Self	lower self
Jewish	soul	mind

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

I don't know about the Islamic anthropology but I did come across a quote by an Islamic mystic called Al-Naraqī who writes of the soul's diseases and pleasures: to “attain ultimate and final perfection, it is necessary to traverse the path of struggle against selfish lusts and immoral tendencies which may exist within the soul, and thus to prepare the soul to receive the grace of God.”²[1]

In Buddhism and Christianity there is also a sense of struggle expressed between the two states although in Christianity this the moral framework of sin and essential ‘fallenness’ contrasted with the righteousness of life in the Spirit. But the honesty of St Paul illustrates, I think, how raw humanity can take people into economic decision-making with results that they do not like themselves and for which they can feel guilty. St Paul explains it like this:

... I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ³[2]

In this conversation we have moved spirituality within the world of faith and religion and spirituality is a commonly shared phenomenon and not only tied to faith. But if we are to practice our spiritual self then, as Thomas says, it means "being related and a life in relationship with myself, the other, the world and the ,Unconditional’”.

8

I have attempted to deal with the question of managerial practice from a faith perspective (Jewish and Christian) in the attached chapter: “Spirituality as Faith in relation to Management”^{4,5}. I hope the chapter illustrates what we should expect from a person who is acting out their spirituality from faith rather than wearing it as a Suit.

With all good wishes

Mike

From: Thomas Dienberg [mailto:th.dienberg@web.de]

Sent: Wednesday, July 29, 2015 11:16 PM

To: Mike Thompson

Cc: Prakash Sethi

Subject: Re: Spirituality and business conduct

² Muhammad Mahdi ibn abi Dharr al-Naraqī, *Jami' al-Sa'adat* (The Collector of Felicities), tr. Shahyar Sa'dat, *al Tawhid Islamic Journal*, Qum: Iran.

³ Romans 7:15-20

⁴ http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-94-007-1153-2_11#page-2

⁵ http://eurospes.org/sites/default/files/pdf/book%20samples/contents_and_introduction.pdf

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

Dear Prakash, dear Mike,

I think that the question you raised, Prakash, is a very challenging one - and it will be a challenge as long as we deal with human beings.

As Mike, and I like your approach very much, shows, there are dualities in the anthropologies of the different religions. These dualities could also be understood as tensions or as the ongoing 'temptations' to emphasize one side toward the other. Spirituality is about those tensions and a constant process of transformation toward the better/ the good/the 'perfection'/the realization of my/our vocation as humans. And that can fail. So there is always the chance to be wear a spiritual suit instead of being spiritual.

Having a look at the Christian spiritual tradition the monks in the desert have a wonderful anthropological concept, when they talk about the demons (in Greek logismoi) or temptations or, the vices (greed, lust, wrath, acedia ...): Life is not about fighting against them, but fighting with them while using their power and strength. They are part of human beings, and they will be. They are part of me and will be, I cannot get rid of them, and I cannot become perfect and the ideal spiritual person I maybe want to be. There is always failure, there are always temptations (ambivalent term: negative a trap, positive as a challenge). Spirituality is about these fights, about the constant change for the better. That maybe an explanation for the gap between an individual behavior in private and in economic decision-making. Just one ...

Sometimes, unfortunately, you find these gaps between the private and the 'public' world. but that would be a misunderstanding of spirituality. Spirituality is, as Mike explained it in his article, the inner self, the person, not just a skin that can be replaced. Spirituality itself is a challenge and disturbance (that's one of the reason I am still working with this word). As the German ex-monk and theologian Fulbert Steffensky does not get tired to express:

„Spirituality is delicate, it does not allow to rest in yourself, it teaches to ask questions: Where are people suffering? What are they suffering of? Who do make them suffer? And that is a spirituality that rather jeopardizes harmony than establishes it.“

People often don't see or often don't want to realize this, I think. Spirituality is a constant thorn in the flesh, it is work and ongoing practice.

Is business bluffing ethical? Sometimes yes and not ... I wouldn't say that it is automatically and simply raw self-centred humanity with religious belief as an accoutrement of culture as you are saying, Mike. It is maybe also related to the challenge of spirituality and morality. It is uncomfortable - and also a matter of courage and self-awareness, of fighting with inner and outer 'resistances'.

Spirituality today has to be considered certainly in a wider than just religious sense. But it has to do with some 'ground inspirations' and with moral and ethical behavior, it is not just a feeling that comes and goes.

And that can be seen in the leadership in business e. g. in a virtual behavior, I agree!!

Nevertheless the question, you are asking, Prakash, remains a challenge for everybody in leadership positions.

I also hope that we can go on with this discussion - and I appreciate your concept and plan for a conference on these topics from different religious/spiritual concepts very much.

All the best for the two of you, best regards from NY

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

P.S.: I just wrote a book on Franciscan Leadership (it is a small one) - and I would like to share that with you. It will be published in Germany in the fall. I hope to find a publisher who is interested in an English version - or try to translate it by myself when I will have the time.

Verzonden: donderdag 30 juli 2015 15:54

Aan: Thomas Dienberg <th.dienberg@web.de>;
Mike Thompson <mikejthompson@me.com>

Onderwerp: RE: Spirituality and business conduct

Dear Thomas

Thank you for your very thoughtful and encouraging response. I hope this dialog will help us all in creating a better articulation of all possible links that suggest various pathways through which individual spirituality may transcend into more ethical decision-making.

I have, however, one observation. It is hard for me to concede that corporate executives have a split persona in that their acts are driven by inner spirituality when making personal decisions, and they transform themselves to homo economicus when making corporate decisions. In the first place, such bi polar personality is hard to imagine as a universal phenomenon that would explain corporate conduct by all executives regardless their ethical and religious orientation. In the second place, I also contend that given similar economic circumstances different corporate executives would respond differently. Ergo, we do need to identify some moderating variables that would bridge the gap.

Best regards.

Prakash

From: Drewes E. Hielema
[mailto:drewes.hielema@planet.nl]
Sent: Thursday, July 30, 2015 11:09 AM
To: Prakash Sethi; 'Thomas Dienberg'; 'Mike Thompson'
Subject: RE: Spirituality and business conduct



Dear S. Prakash Sethi;

I have followed your discussion intensively. The reason to involve myself in the discussion was triggered by your following remark:

” It is hard for me to concede that corporate executives have a split persona in that their acts are driven by inner spirituality when making personal decisions, and they transform themselves to homo economicus when making corporate decisions.”

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

Two year ago I wrote an article: “A PROFILE OF THE FUTURE MANAGER⁶.

Somewhere I do state:

In order to avoid jeopardizing oneself, it is necessary that one engages the dual aspects of one personality, which means that both heart – emotions- and head – reasoning – simultaneously, say in balance are to be involved to create the conditions for personal growth and development. But it is also here where possible conflicts between (ones) ethics and the objectives of the firm could clash! As Jackall says⁷:

“To me, a person can have any beliefs they want, as long as they leave them at home.”

It is this process of alienation of individuality, of his authentic self that I will venture to describe. However: What is authentic leadership? Do companies really want to hire authentic, spiritually healthy people? Will they not become a threat for the existing management team? This is the essence of my thesis that if a person wants to pursue a career within an organization, he or she must exchange his or her authentic self with that of the organization in order to comply with the company’s objectives, which are mostly short-term and mostly not for the good of the other human beings.

Here the philosophy of Levinas comes into the vision. It is a matter of either assuming the firm’s ethical stance or the firm takes over the person’s way of thinking. All this implies that lacking the knowledge of your own motives and self-knowledge makes it impossible to detect in yourself whether you even possess a genuine authenticity. It could well be that in our Western, short-term thinking society, being authentic could be more of a handicap than an asset. The best way to come to a more satisfactory answer to this problem is to consult the experts. I will first outline what I mean with the ‘self’ and how this ‘self’ can be reinforced, because a teetering ‘self’, an unstable personality, can easily succumb to a sublimated self. In her article about authentic leadership, Klenke⁸, gives a framework to rely on and I will follow her reasoning. I presuppose that to make a career involves assuming responsibility and thus automatically engaging in a form of leadership. To be a manager means to accept leadership. To be part of an organization means to place oneself in a situation involving the ratio/emotio dichotomy combined with the particular relationship to the third part, the other, the boss, the colleague and the client. In that relationship this nucleus is again a sub-part of a larger system. Here Roberts⁹ made an intriguing comment. He quotes from: “Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence.” Where Levinas¹⁰ says:

“The ground for ethics lies not within being – as a reason, or thought, or choice - but rather is beyond essence in the way that: “from the start the other affects us despite ourselves.[4]” And so on”.

Could split of personalities in nowadays corporate life be, what we call: ‘evil’?

⁶ “A PROFILE OF THE FUTURE MANAGER. A critical vision of entrepreneurship.” in Critical Management Studies: Extending the Limits of Neo-Liberal Capitalism. University of Manchester, the UK, 10th – 12th of July 2013. Track 9: Critical Entrepreneurship Studies”

⁷ Jackall, Robert: “Moral Mazes. The World of Corporate Managers”; Oxford University Press, New York- Oxford. 1988 p-51

⁸ Klenke, Karin: “Authentic Leadership: A Self, Leader. And Spiritual Identity Perspective”; International Journal of Leadership Studies, Vol. 3 Issue 1, 2007, pp 68-97 © 2007 School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship, Regent University ISSN 1554-3145

⁹ Roberts, John: “Corporate Governance and the Ethics of Narcissus”; © 2001 Business Ethics Quarterly. Volume 11, Issue 1 ISSN 1052-150X pp 109-127

¹⁰ Levinas, Emmanuel: "Otherwise than being or beyond essence", Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/ Boston/ London, 1981 pp 129

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

Or is it as Arendt Hannah says¹¹ after reflecting at the Eichmann process and which is rather extended:

“This total absence of thinking attracted my interest. Is evil-doing, not just the sins of omission but the sins of commission, possible in the absence of not merely “base motives” (as the law calls it) but of any motives at all, any particular prompting of interest or violation? Is wickedness, however we may define it, this being “determined to prove a villain,” not a necessary condition for evil doing? Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought? Do the inability to think and a disastrous failure of we commonly call conscience coincide? The question that impose itself was: Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such a nature that it ‘conditions’ men against evil-doing?”

Hoping you do forgive me my intrusion into this discussion. In my professional life as a project manager in the petrochemical international engineering and construction, I have engaged a lot of double thinking and double acting.

Kind regards,

Drewes E. Hielema. drewes.hielema@planet.nl

On 30 Jul 2015, at 16:33, Prakash Sethi <Prakash.Sethi@baruch.cuny.edu> wrote:

Dear Drewes:

Thank you for your email. You have indeed made a good point and I concede its validity to an extent. However, my argument still remains. To wit, your statement presents the bipolar behavior on the part of corporate executive as a “given, i.e., fact”, which is certainly not the case. Executives are not robots and therefore they would exhibit various degrees of diversion – both substantive and also superficial – which must be explained either in terms of economic circumstances of the corporation, and or, personal judgments of the executive as to the economic-moral-ethical risks he/she is willing to take.

Economic rationality may be used both as (a) process, and (b) outcome. We may make ethical or socially responsible decision, but use economic rationality in terms of finding the most efficient way of implementing that decision. Alternately, we may use economic rationality as the desired outcome, but use social rationality to minimize negative externalities, which may occur in the future as a consequence of applying economic rationality in the short-term.

Please rest assured, I am not arguing against your logic. However, I am suggesting that this logic cannot be absolute. Therefore, we must explore alternative ways of explaining the conditions which would make corporate executives temper the absoluteness of economic logic by using other forms of rationality, i.e., political, social, ethical, and communitarian.

Best regards.

Prakash

¹¹ Arendt, Hannah: ‘http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970069?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents’-p-418

Discussion about: “Role of Spirituality in Managing in the VUCA world.”

Dear Prakash

wo 12-8-2015 15:12 Mike Thompson wrote: Mike Thompson <mthompson@ceibs.edu>

A late return to the fray on the question of bipolar behaviour in seeking to understand the “ethereal spirituality” of our initial discussion.

I think that economic rationalists who believe every motivation can be explained by self-interest imply that the executive is a kind of bipolar robot (see my earlier reference to Albert Carr (1968) and echoed in Drewes’s reference to Robert Jackall (1988). I don’t think that Drewes and Thomas mean a “split persona”, rather we observe in the Self, two motivations working with tension and angst:

- (i) homo economicus but not rational (consistent) in practice and
- (ii) homo socialis/spiritualis who inspires a motivation towards the Other (Drewes’s reference to Levinas).

However, a spiritual view of humankind does not really present a human person in this way. Spirituality perhaps heightens a sensitivity towards “good and bad behaviours” in all of us and in life generally. The reality of moral sentiment is the canvas for behaviours in all spheres of life. I don’t think economic rationality and social rationality are so easily separated as you suggest - notwithstanding the definitional problem inherent in “economic rationality”. Indeed there is a question as to the rationality of social science anyway (Samuelsson). Love, duty, commitment, loyalty and sympathy are mixed with the warp and woof of decision-making and behaviour and I have little confidence that objective rationality is actually practiced. Drewes's work in project management for over 30 years bears this out in his various case studies of consistent inefficiency and irrational decision-making in major projects.

Two quotes by respected scholars that argue for a non-rational but integrated approach to human behaviour and illustrate the tension that I think we explore between economic self / company interest and choices that are not based purely on one’s own welfare (Sen’s commitment):

[1] Modelling according to self-interest alone can be heuristically useful, even when it captures only a small fraction of the relevant motivation. But even when we add the motivations of love and duty to the model, we inevitably fail to capture the full meaning to the actors of either motivation. For this reason, some humility, not only about what we can know about others but also about what we can know with a particular analytic tool, is an appropriate stance.

Jane Mansbridge, 1995. Rational Choice Gains by Losing. *Political Psychology*, 16 (1), p.153.

[2] The characteristic of commitment with which I am most concerned here is the fact that it drives a wedge between personal choice and personal welfare, and much of traditional economic theory relies on the identity of the two.

Amartya Sen, 1977, *Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory*. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 6(4), p.326.

Look forward to discussing more in person

Mike