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Ethical Perspectives

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Ethical theories are critical to organizational transformation. We will employ them repeatedly throughout the remainder of this text. Ethical perspectives help us identify and define problems, force us to think systematically, encourage us to view issues from many different vantage points, and provide us with decision-making guidelines. In this chapter I'll introduce five widely used ethical approaches. I'll briefly summarize each perspective and then offer an evaluation based on the theory's advantages and disadvantages.

Resist the temptation to choose your favorite approach and ignore the rest. Use a variety of theories when possible. Applying all five approaches to the same problem (practicing ethical pluralism) is a good way to generate new

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insights about the issue. You can discover the value of ethical pluralism by using each theory to analyze the Chapter End Case (see Application Project 7 on page 24). You may find that some perspectives are more suited to this problem than others. Combining insights from more than one theory might help you come up with a better solution. At the very least, drawing from several perspectives should give you more confidence in your choice and make you better prepared to defend your conclusion.

Utilitarianism: Do the Greatest Good for the Greatest Number

Many people weigh the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives when making significant decisions. They create mental balance sheets listing the pluses and minuses of each course of action. When it's a particularly important choice, such as deciding which job offer to take or where to earn a graduate degree, they may commit their lists to paper to make it easier to identify the relative merits of their options.

Utilitarianism is based on the premise that our ethical choices, like other types of decisions, should be based on their consequences.¹ English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) argued that the best decisions (1) generate the most benefits as compared to their disadvantages, and (2) benefit the largest number of people. In other words, Utilitarianism is attempting to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. *Utility* can be defined as what is best in a specific case (Act Utilitarianism) or as what is generally preferred in most contexts (Rule Utilitarianism). We can decide, for example, that telling a specific lie is justified in one situation (to protect a trade secret) but, as a general rule, believe that lying is wrong because it causes more harm than good.

Utilitarians consider both short- and long-term consequences when making ethical determinations. If the immediate benefits of a decision don't outweigh its possible future costs, this alternative is rejected. However, if the immediate good is sure and the future good uncertain, decision makers generally select the option that produces the short-term benefit. Utilitarians are also more concerned about the ratio of harm to evil than the absolute amount of happiness or unhappiness produced by a choice. In other words, a decision that produces a great amount of good but an equal amount of harm would be rejected in favor of an alternative that produces a moderate amount of good at very little cost. Further, the Utilitarian decision maker keeps her or his own interests in mind but gives them no more weight than anyone else's.

Making a choice according to Utilitarian principles is a three-step process. First, identify all the possible courses of action. Second, estimate the direct as well as indirect costs and benefits for each option. Finally, select the alternative that produces the greatest amount of good based on the cost-benefit ratios generated in step two. Government officials frequently follow this process

when deciding whether or not to impose or loosen regulations. Take decisions about raising rural highway speed limits, for instance. States have the option of maintaining the 55 mile per hour limit or selecting from a range of higher speeds. Raising speed limits produces immediate benefits—reduced travel and delivery times. Fewer motorists are tempted to break the law. These benefits, however, must be weighed against the short-term cost of greater fuel consumption and the long-term risk of higher fatalities. After balancing the costs and benefits, a great many states have opted to loosen speed restrictions.

EVALUATION

Utilitarianism is a popular approach to moral reasoning. We're used to weighing the outcomes of all types of decisions, and the Utilitarian decision-making rule covers every conceivable type of choice. Few could argue with the ultimate goal of evaluating consequences, which is to promote human welfare by maximizing benefits to as many people as possible. Utilitarianism is probably the most defensible approach in emergency situations, such as in the wake of the massive earthquake that hit Pakistan in 2005. In the midst of such widespread devastation, medical personnel ought to give top priority to those who are most likely to survive. It does little good to spend time with a terminal patient while a person who would benefit from treatment dies.

Despite its popularity, Utilitarianism suffers from serious deficiencies.² Sometimes identifying possible consequences can be difficult or impossible. Many different groups may be affected, unforeseen consequences may develop, and so on. Even when consequences are clear, evaluating their relative merits can be challenging. Being objective is difficult because we humans tend to downplay long-term risks in favor of immediate rewards (see Box 1.1) and to favor ourselves when making decisions. Due to the difficulty of identifying and evaluating potential costs and benefits, Utilitarian decision makers sometimes reach different conclusions when faced with the same dilemma. States have opted to raise highway speeds but they don't agree as to what the new limits should be. Some state legislatures determined that traveling at 65 miles per hour produces the greatest good; others decided that 70 or 75 miles per hour generates the most benefits.

CASE STUDY

Box 1.1 Stronger, Faster, Bigger: Sacrificing the Future for High Performance

Athletes demonstrate how easy it is to ignore long-term consequences when making choices. They are all too willing to sacrifice their futures for immediate

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results. Baseball stars Ken Caminiti and Jose Canseco have admitted to taking steroids. Competitors in a variety of other sports, including track, cricket, soccer, rugby, cycling, tennis, ice hockey, and orienteering, have been suspended for taking illegal performance drugs. In professional football, linemen are bulking up to land jobs. The number of players listed at over 300 pounds soared from 130 to 350 between 1996 and 2004, and 70 percent of this group is made up of offensive linemen.

The dangers of performance-enhancing drugs are well documented. Users of anabolic steroids, which imitate the effects of testosterone, can experience mood swings; become hyperaggressive; suffer a higher likelihood of injury and liver damage; and risk high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, and blood clots. Males may also experience impotence, early onset of baldness, and breast development. Females may grow more body and facial hair and develop a deeper voice. Their breasts may shrink and menstrual problems may develop. Quitting can also be dangerous. Those who stop taking the drugs face a drastic drop in testosterone levels, which can lead to severe depression and suicide among men. Ken Caminiti, the 1996 National League MVP, believed that his drug addiction problem started with his use of steroids (he later died of an overdose).

The dangers of drastic weight gain are just as real as those linked to steroids, though not as well publicized. All professional football players face a 90 percent chance of permanent physical injury if they compete for 3 years. However, the risk to massive linemen is even greater. A study conducted by *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that the rate of sleep apnea among NFL players is five times higher than among other males in the same age groups. Apnea victims suffer from repeated interruptions of breathing during sleep that can sometimes result in an irregular heartbeat. Over time, sufferers are more likely to experience high blood pressure and congestive heart failure. Apnea is believed to have contributed to the death of former pro-bowl defensive lineman Reggie White, who died in his sleep at age 43. In addition to developing apnea, heavy players, like other heavy Americans, are much more likely to develop diabetes and suffer from strokes.

Why do athletes risk their reputations and lives to further their careers? Because the rewards for doing so are so great. Enhanced performance can literally mean millions of dollars in higher salaries and endorsement contracts, not to mention celebrity status. Steroid-enhanced performance can make baseball players into highly sought after free agents. Bulking up allows football players to earn fortunes while playing the sport they love in front of adoring fans. Then, too, it's easy to discount future risks by rationalizing that "it won't happen to me" or to argue that the dangers don't outweigh the immediate payoffs. After all, earning a substantially higher salary now can guarantee a comfortable (if not luxurious) lifestyle for an athlete and his or her family after retirement. The trade-offs—a shorter life span, serious health problems, and chronic pain—appear to be worth the risk.

Professional athletes may seem shortsighted. Nevertheless, millions of average citizens also mortgage their futures in order to reach their career goals. They work 80-hour weeks, eat unhealthy food, deprive themselves of sleep, ignore their families, and endure high stress levels in order to earn more money and to get promoted. The sacrifices may be worth it, but few conduct the rational cost-benefit analysis required to determine what will generate the greatest good in the long run.

DISCUSSION PROBES

1. Imagine that you are a professional athlete in your favorite sport. How far would you go to improve your performance?
2. Athletes use a variety of tactics to boost their performance (training at high altitudes or in oxygen deprivation chambers, going on special diets and training regimens). Where do you draw the line between ethical and unethical tactics? What criteria do you use to make this determination?
3. Do you hold fans partly responsible for the poor health choices of athletes? Why or why not?
4. What steps can you take to better balance long-term consequences against short-term rewards when making ethical choices?

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Ironically, one of the greatest strengths of Utilitarian theory—its concern for collective human welfare—is also one of its greatest weaknesses. In focusing on what's best for the group as a whole, Utilitarianism discounts the worth of the individual. The needs of the person are subjugated to the needs of the group or organization. This type of reasoning can justify all kinds of abuse. For example, a number of lawsuits accuse Wal-Mart of cheating individual employees out of overtime pay to cut labor costs for the greater good of the company.³

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Kant's Categorical Imperative: Do What's Right No Matter What the Consequences Are

Like the Utilitarians, German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) developed a simple set of rules that could be applied to every type of ethical decision. However, he reached a very different conclusion about what those principles should be. Kant argued that moral duties or imperatives are *categorical*—they should be obeyed without exception. Individuals should do what is morally right no matter what the consequences are.⁴ His approach to moral reasoning falls under the category of deontological ethics. Deontological ethicists argue that we ought to make choices based on our duty to follow universal truths, which we sense intuitively or identify through reason (*deon* is the Greek word for duty). Moral acts arise out of our will or intention to follow our duty, not in response to circumstances. Based on this criterion, an electric utility that is forced into reducing its rates is not acting morally; a utility that lowers its rates to help its customers is.

According to Kant, “what is right for one is right for all.” We need to ask ourselves one question: Would I want everyone else to make the decision I did? If the answer is yes, the choice is justified. If the answer is no, the decision is wrong.

Based on this reasoning, certain behaviors, like honoring our commitments and being kind, are always right. Other acts, like cheating and murder, are always wrong. Kant cited borrowing money that we never intend to repay as one behavior that violates the Categorical Imperative. If enough people made such false promises, the banking industry would break down because lenders would refuse to provide funds.⁵ Deliberate idleness also violates the principle, because no one would exercise his or her talents in a culture where everyone sought to rest and enjoy himself or herself.

Kant also argued for the importance of “treating humanity as an end.” Others can help us reach our objectives, but they should never be considered solely as a means to an end. We should, instead, respect and encourage the capacity of others to choose for themselves. It is wrong under this standard for companies to expose manufacturing workers to hazardous chemicals without their consent or knowledge. Managers shouldn't coerce or threaten employees, because such tactics violate freedom of choice. Coworkers who refuse to help one another are behaving unethically because ignoring the needs of others limits their options.

EVALUATION

Kant's imperative is a simple yet powerful ethical tool. Not only is the principle easy to remember, but asking if we would want our behavior to be made into a universal standard should also prevent a number of ethical miscues.

Emphasis on duty builds moral courage. Those driven by the conviction that certain behaviors are either right or wrong no matter what the situation are more likely to blow the whistle on unethical behavior (see Chapter 8), resist group pressure to compromise personal ethical standards, follow through on their choices, and so on. Kant's emphasis on respecting the right of others to choose is an important guideline to keep in mind when making ethical choices in organizations. This standard promotes the sharing of information and concern for others while condemning deceptive and coercive tactics.

Critiques of Kant's system of reasoning often center on his assertion that there are universal principles that should be followed in every situation. In almost every case, we can think of exceptions. For instance, many of us agree that killing is wrong yet support capital punishment for serial murderers. We value privacy rights but have given many up in the name of national security. Then, too, how do we account for those who honestly believe they are doing the right thing even when they are engaged in evil? "Consistent Nazis" were convinced that killing Jews was morally right. They wanted their fellow Germans to engage in this behavior; they did what they perceived to be their duty.

Conflicting duties also pose a challenge to deontological thinking. Complex ethical dilemmas often involve competing obligations. For example, we should be loyal to both our bosses and coworkers. Yet being loyal to a supervisor may mean breaking loyalty with peers, such as when a supervisor asks us to reveal the source of a complaint when we've promised to keep the identity of that coworker secret. How do we determine which duty has priority? Kant's imperative offers little guidance in such situations.

There is one final weakness in Kant's theory that is worth noting. By focusing on intention, Kant downplayed the importance of ethical action. Worthy intent does little good unless it is acted out. We typically judge individuals based on what they do, not on their motives.

Rawls's Justice as Fairness: Balancing Freedom and Equality

Limited organizational resources make conflicts inevitable. There are never enough jobs, raises, corner offices, travel funds, laptop computers, and other benefits to go around. As a result, disputes arise over how to distribute these goods. Departments battle over the relative size of their budgets, for example, and employees compete for performance bonuses, promotions, and job titles. Participants in these conflicts often complain that they have been the victims of discrimination or favoritism.

Over the last third of the twentieth century, Harvard philosopher John Rawls developed a set of guidelines for justly resolving disputes like these that

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involve the distribution of resources.⁶ His principles are designed to foster cooperation in democracies. In democratic societies, all citizens are free and equal before the law. However, at the same time, citizens are unequal. They vary in status, economic standing, talents, and abilities. Rawls's standards honor individual freedom—the foundation of democratic cultures—but also encourage more equitable distribution of societal benefits. The theorist primarily focused on the underlying political structure of society as a whole. Nevertheless, his principles also apply to organizations and institutions that function within this societal framework.

Rawls rejected the use of Utilitarian principles to allocate resources. He believed that individuals have rights that should never be violated no matter what the outcome. In addition, he asserted that seeking the greatest good for the greatest number can seriously disadvantage particular groups and individuals. This can be seen in modern Israel. In an attempt to build a lasting peace, the Israeli government has removed Jewish settlements from Palestinian land. The whole region will benefit if this strategy succeeds. However, the displaced settlers are understandably angry at the loss of their homes.

As an alternative to basing decisions on cost-benefit ratios, Rawls argued that we should follow these principles of justice:⁷

Principle 1: Each person has an equal right to the same basic liberties that are compatible with similar liberties for all.

Principle 2: Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. A) They are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. B) They are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.

The first principle, the “principle of equal liberty,” has priority. It states that certain rights are protected and must be equally applied to all. These liberties include the right to vote, freedom of speech and thought, freedom to own personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Invading employee privacy and pressuring managers into contributing to particular political candidates would be unethical according to this standard. So would failing to honor contracts, since such behavior would reduce our freedom to enter into agreements for fear of being defrauded.

Principle 2A, “the equal opportunity principle,” asserts that everyone should have the same chance to qualify for offices and jobs. Job discrimination based on race, gender, or ethnic origin is forbidden. Further, all citizens ought to have access to the training and education needed to prepare for these positions. Principle 2B, “the difference principle,” recognizes that inequalities exist but that priority should be given to meeting the needs of the disadvantaged.

Rawls introduced the “veil of ignorance” to support his claim that his principles should guide decision making in democratic societies like Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. Imagine, he said, a group of people who are asked to come up with a set of guidelines that will govern their interactions. Group members are ignorant of their characteristics or societal position. Faced with such uncertainty, these individuals will likely base their choices on the “maximin rule.” This rule states that the best option is the one whose worst outcome is better than the worst outcomes of all the other options. Or, to put it another way, the best choice is the alternative that guarantees everyone a minimum level of benefits.

Rawls argued that individuals standing behind the veil of ignorance would adopt his moral guidelines because they would ensure the best outcomes even in the worst of circumstances. Citizens would select (1) equal liberty, because they would be guaranteed freedom even if they occupy the lowest rungs of society; (2) equal opportunity, because if they turned out to be the most talented societal members, they would not be held back by low social standing or lack of opportunity; and (3) the difference principle, because they would want to be sure they were cared for if they ended up disadvantaged.

EVALUATION

Rawls became one of the most influential philosophers of his time because he offered a way to reconcile the long-standing tension between individual freedom and social justice. His system for distributing resources and benefits encompasses personal liberty as well as the common good. Individual rights are protected. Moreover, talented, skilled, or fortunate people are free to pursue their goals, but the fruits of their labor must also benefit their less fortunate neighbors. Applying Rawls’s principles would have a significant positive impact on the moral behavior of organizations. High achievers would continue to be rewarded for their efforts, but not, as is too often the case, at the expense of their coworkers. All of an organization’s members would be guaranteed a minimum level of benefits, such as a living wage and health insurance. Everyone would have equal opportunity for training, promotion, and advancement. The growing gap in compensation between the top and bottom layers of the organization would shrink.

Rawls’s theory addresses some of the weaknesses of Utilitarianism outlined earlier. In his system, individuals have intrinsic value and are not to be treated as means to some greater end. There are certain rights that should always be protected. The interests of the organization as a whole do not justify extreme harm to particular groups and individuals.

Stepping behind a veil of ignorance does more than provide a justification for Rawls’s model; it can also serve as a useful technique to use when making

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moral choices. Status and power differences are an integral part of organizational life. Nonetheless, if we can set these inequities aside temporarily, we are likely to make more just decisions. The least advantaged usually benefit when status differences are excluded from the decision-making process. We need to ask ourselves if we are treating everyone fairly or if we are being unduly influenced by someone's position or her or his relationship to us. Classical orchestras provide one example of how factoring out differences can improve the lot of marginalized groups. Orchestras began to hire a much higher percentage of female musicians after they erected screens that prevented judges from seeing the gender of players during auditions.⁸

Rawls's influence has not spared his theory from intense criticism. Skeptics note that the theory's abstractness limits its usefulness. Rawls offered only broad guidelines, which can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Definitions of justice and fairness vary widely, a fact that undermines the usefulness of his principles. What seems fair to one group or individual often appears grossly unjust to others. Take programs that reserve a certain percentage of federal contracts for minority contractors, for example. Giving preferential treatment to minorities can be defended based on the equal opportunity and difference principles. Members of these groups claim that they should be favored in the bidding process to redress past discrimination and to achieve equal footing with whites. On the other hand, such policies can be seen as impinging upon the equal liberty principle because they limit the freedom of Caucasians to pursue their goals. White contractors feel that these requirements unfairly restrict their options. They are denied work when they believe they can provide better quality at lower cost than those given the work.

By trying to reconcile the tension between liberty and equality, Rawls left himself open to attack from advocates of both values. Some complain that he would distribute too much to the have-nots; others believe that his concern for liberty means that he wouldn't give enough. Further, philosophers point out that there is no guarantee that parties who step behind the veil of ignorance would come up with the same set of principles as Rawls. They might not use the maximin rule to guide their decisions. Rather than emphasize fairness, these individuals might decide to emphasize certain rights. Libertarians, for instance, hold that freedom from coercion is the most important human right. Every individual should be able to produce and sell as he or she chooses, regardless of the impact of his or her business on the poor. Capitalist theorists believe that benefits should be distributed based on the contributions each person makes to the group. They argue that helping out the less advantaged rewards laziness while discouraging productive people from doing their best. Because decision makers may reach different conclusions behind the veil, skeptics contend that Rawls's guidelines lack moral force, that other approaches to distributing resources are just as valid as the notion of fairness.

Communitarianism: Promoting Shared Moral Values

Communitarianism is the newest of the five perspectives presented in this chapter. While communitarian ideas can be traced back as far as ancient Israel and Greece, the modern (responsive) Communitarian movement began in the United States in 1990. That year, sociologist Amatai Etzioni gathered a group of fifteen ethicists, social scientists, and philosophers together to address their concerns about the health of American society. Members of this gathering took the name “Communitarian” to highlight their desire to shift the focus of citizens from individual rights to communal responsibilities.⁹ The next year, the group started a journal (*The Responsive Communitarian*) and organized a teach-in that produced the Communitarian platform. Communitarian thinkers like Philip Selznick, William Galston, and Robert Bellah have produced a steady stream of journal articles, books, and position papers outlining Communitarian principles and stands on a variety of modern social issues, like children’s television, sobriety checkpoints, airport security screening, and privacy rights. At the same time, Communitarian philosophy has taken hold in Great Britain.

Many of the major tenets of Communitarianism are outlined in the movement’s platform.¹⁰ Important platform planks include: (1) Human dignity is intertwined with the health of the community. Liberty flourishes in a healthy society, but no community can exist for long unless members contribute their time, attention, resources, and energy to shared projects. (2) The success of a democratic society depends not on force or government intervention but upon building shared values, practices, and habits. (3) Communal values in responsive communities are developed by the group but are subject to universal standards. (4) The institutions of civil society are charged with reinforcing moral values. (5) Citizens should reject selfishness and care for the material and social well-being of others. (6) Community members have a responsibility to stay active in political and civil matters by staying informed, voting, paying their taxes, serving on juries, and so forth.

Communitarians argue that organizations are essential to character formation. Together, societal institutions speak with a moral voice, articulating and reinforcing communal values. The family plays the greatest role in shaping character. For that reason, Communitarian theorists urge women to leave the workforce to serve as full-time parents and encourage men to become equal partners in child rearing. School is the most important source of moral education and character formation after the family. Government has a duty to encourage civil participation and to be responsive to the needs of citizens. Voluntary associations (such as soccer leagues, churches, and Rotary clubs) reinforce social connections and informally sanction those who violate important values and standards. Businesses encourage concern for others by responding to community needs.

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Etzioni describes Communitarianism as the second environmental movement. Protecting nature was the concern of the first environmental movement; creating a “good society” is the focus of the second. As social environmentalists, Communitarians hope to restore the social fabric of society, which shows plenty of evidence of decay—high divorce and crime rates, child neglect, declining schools, excessive materialism, illiteracy, drug use, and teen pregnancy. The United States needs renewal that can only come through the creation of healthy communities. Communities (including organizations) form when individuals develop a web of relationships and are committed to a shared history and identity.

Organizational consultants Juanita Brown and David Isaacs identified seven core processes (“the Seven Cs”) that are essential to building and maintaining organizational communities.¹¹ As you read the list, consider how you would rate your organization (turn to Application Project 4 on page 23).

1. Commitment

Communities emerge around shared commitment. Commitment develops when employees work together toward something they find important. They invest their resources, pool their efforts, overcome obstacles, learn together, and so on. Using a common language, stories, metaphors, and other symbols to help members develop common understandings supports commitment. According to Brown and Isaacs, budget cuts and workforce reductions pose a very real danger to commitment levels. Business and non-profit leaders must be honest about economic realities, seek input about how to respond, and endure their fair share of the cuts. Employees should be tangibly rewarded if the company is saved from bankruptcy through their efforts.

2. Competence

Successful communities are populated with people who have the knowledge, skills, and qualities needed by the group as a whole. Leaders in these organizations encourage followers to keep on learning by providing training, tuition remission for college courses, and funding for conferences. They also foster the capacity of the organization as a whole to learn. Learning organizations reflect (a) the capacity of *aspiration* (the ability to create the desired future rather than leaving the future to chance), (b) the capacity for *reflective conversation* in which members dialogue about their work and reflect on completed projects, and (c) the capacity for *conceptualization*—the ability to think about how the organizational parts work together as a system.

3. Contribution

Organizational communities help employees recognize how their work contributes to the group's success. They recognize and draw upon the diverse talents of each person. Doing so encourages the extra effort that contributes to high performance.

4. Collaboration

Collaboration is nurtured by "reliable interdependence." Members need to know that they can count on others as they pursue their tasks. True communities foster collaboration by involving a variety of stakeholder groups in pursuit of a common goal (see Chapter 10). They encourage the free flow of information through e-mail, newsletters, bulletin boards, and other means. At the same time, communities recognize the importance of fostering personal relationships that produce trust.

5. Continuity

Lack of continuity (acquisitions, mergers, reorganization, retirements, turnover) threatens the continued existence of community. Wise leaders encourage experienced employees to stay put rather than moving on. They reward organizational veterans for learning new skills and encourage them to share their knowledge. Community-minded managers insure institutional memory by recording learning (the best practices for introducing a new product, for example) and by developing processes for passing on the culture to new members.

6. Conscience

Conscience mechanisms reinforce shared values, purpose, and ethical standards. They include, for instance, codes of ethics, mission statements, official corporate values, and ethics hotlines. (We'll examine these elements and socialization processes in Chapter 9.)

7. Conversation

Verbal interaction creates shared purpose and worldviews, fosters relationships, and solves problems. Organizational communities are marked by ongoing electronic and face-to-face discussions about strategy and issues. They create a climate where individuals can have honest conversations with one another, drawing upon their diverse perspectives to generate solutions that benefit the common organizational good. (Turn to Chapter 4 for a closer look at interpersonal dialogue.)

Concern for the common good is an underlying theme of the Communitarian movement. Citizens work towards shared purposes, shoulder their

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responsibilities, reinforce common values, and express concern for others. Focus on the common good discourages selfish, unethical behavior. Although practices like false advertising and withholding taxes may serve the needs of an organization, such actions are unethical because they rarely benefit society as a whole. Further, if each group looks out only for its own welfare, the community as a whole suffers. Competing special interests have made it extremely difficult to tackle major societal problems like Social Security and Medicaid reform.

EVALUATION

There are several reasons why Communitarianism is a promising approach to moral reasoning. First, Communitarians recognize the social basis of morality. Our views of what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable are largely the product of the cultures we live in. Second, Communitarianism highlights the dangers posed by the individualistic focus of Western culture. We have paid a high price for trying to maintain our freedom and autonomy at all costs. Selfishness needs to be supplanted by a commitment to communal responsibilities and a focus on the common good.

Third, Communitarianism promotes the benefits of participation and dialogue. Citizens need to be involved in molding values, debating ethical issues, and evaluating policies. Fourth, the rise of Communitarianism coincides with renewed interest in virtue ethics, which will be our focus in Chapter 2. Both Communitarian theorists and virtue ethicists are concerned with the development of moral character. Virtuous citizens build moral communities that, in turn, encourage further character formation. Fifth, Communitarianism addresses the role of organizational communities. Schools, churches, governments, businesses, and voluntary associations are to communicate important values.

The Communitarian movement has more than its share of detractors. Some critics fear that individual rights will be eroded in the pursuit of the common good. (Turn to the Chapter End Case to see how privacy concerns can clash with the need for public safety.) Other critics worry about promoting one set of values in a pluralistic society. Who decides, for example, which values are taught in the public schools? Still other critics take issue with the portrait of community painted by the Communitarians. Many collectives fall well short of the Communitarian ideal. They are homogeneous, repressive and exclusive, not responsive and inclusive. Gated communities springing up all across the nation are symptomatic of this tendency to segregate into different economic and social groups and to shut others out. Feminists accuse Communitarians of trying to recreate the patriarchal patterns of the past by encouraging women to stay at home to raise children.

The “toughest question” responsive Communitarians face is determining how to judge community values, according to Etzioni.¹² Local values should be respected because they reflect the unique history of the group. Community standards can be oppressive, however, as in the case of American cities that tolerate police brutality. As a consequence, local preferences need to be accountable to the larger society. Etzioni argued that broad deontological ethical principles should be used to evaluate community standards when groups can’t reconcile their values differences. Yet, invoking these principles may not resolve such disputes, because parties may prioritize principles differently. Proponents of abortion put a much higher value on privacy rights and personal freedom than do foes of abortion, for example.

Altruism: Concern for Others

Altruism is based on the principle that we should help others regardless of whether or not we profit from doing so.¹³ Assisting those in need may be rewarding (we may feel good about ourselves or receive public recognition, for example). Nevertheless, altruistic behavior seeks to benefit the other person, not the self. The most notable cases of altruism are those that involve significant self-sacrifice, as when a soldier jumps on a grenade to save the rest of his platoon or when an employee donates a kidney to another worker in need of a transplant. The word *altruism* comes from the Latin root *alter*, which means “other.” Advocates of altruism argue that love of one’s neighbor is the ultimate ethical standard. People are never a means to an end; they *are* the ends.

Not everybody agrees that prosocial behavior is possible. One group of evolutionary biologists believes that humans are conduits of “selfish genes.” For instance, they believe that anything we do on behalf of family members is motivated by the desire to transmit our genetic code. Some skeptical philosophers argue that people are egoists. Every act, no matter how altruistic on the surface, always serves our needs, like when we help others because we expect to get paid back at some later time. However, a growing body of research in sociology, political science, economics, social psychology—and other fields—establishes that true altruism does exist and is an integral part of the human experience.¹⁴ In fact, altruistic behavior is common in everyday life:

We humans spend much of our time and energy helping others. We stay up all night to comfort a friend who has suffered a broken relationship. We send money to rescue famine victims halfway round the world, or to save whales, or to support public television. We spend millions of hours per week helping as volunteers in hospitals, nursing homes, AIDS hospices, fire departments, rescue squads, shelters, halfway houses, peer-counseling programs and the like. We stop on a busy highway to help a stranded motorist change a flat tire,

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or spend an hour in the cold to push a friend's—even a stranger's—car out of a snowdrift.¹⁵

Care for others appears to be a universal value, one promoted by religions the world over. Representatives from a variety of religious groups agree that every person deserves humane treatment, no matter what his or her ethnic background, language, skin color, political beliefs, or social standing (see Chapter 10).¹⁶ Western thought has been greatly influenced by the altruistic emphasis of Judaism and Christianity. The command to love God and to love others as we love ourselves is the most important obligation in Judeo-Christian ethics. Since humans are made in the image of God and God is love, we have an obligation to love others no matter who they are and no matter what their relationship to us. Jesus drove home this point in the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this tale a generous businessman stops (at great risk to himself and his reputation) to befriend a wounded Jewish traveler—a person he could have considered his enemy. (See Box 1.2 for another story that highlights the importance of loving one's neighbor.)

Box 1.2 The Rabbi Goes to Heaven

In Nemirov, a small town in eastern Europe not unlike the town where the now famous Tevye of *Fiddler on the Roof* fame lived, a story is told of a Chassidic rabbi, his devoted flock, and a skeptic. The people, of course, were very, very poor, the rabbi very, very holy, and the skeptic very, very unbelieving. The story is as follows: The people believed that each year, just prior to the Penitential Season marking the Days of Awe which began the Jewish New Year, their rabbi went to heaven. After all, the Jews, however poor, still needed to eke out some kind of a livelihood, even as they needed good health and good matches for their sons and daughters and they believed that their rabbi went to heaven to intercede on their behalf. One day, a skeptic, a Jewish shoemaker from Lithuania, arrived in town, and on that day the Jews of the town were very happy because some time within the next twenty-four hours their rabbi was going to heaven, they said, to plead for them before the Throne of the Most High.

The skeptic called them foolish Jews for believing this. Not even Moses ascended to heaven, let alone a poor rabbi. Nevertheless, the skeptic was intrigued, so he decided to follow the rabbi, even to hide in the rabbi's house so that he would be able to see everything the rabbi did that day and thereby discredit the notions of the rabbi's foolish flock.

That evening, when the Jews of Nemirov journeyed to the river to symbolically rid themselves of their sins, their rabbi was not among them,

nor was he in the house of prayer. "He must be in heaven," a congregant announced, and all of the others agreed.

Meanwhile the skeptic, hiding under the rabbi's bed, saw the rabbi dress himself in the clothing of a Polish peasant. On his feet he placed high boots, and on his head a woodsman's cap, and on his body a greatcoat. The rabbi then placed a sack in the inner pocket of the coat and tied a large leather belt about his waist. The skeptic could not imagine what was going on until the rabbi took hold of an axe. "For sure," thought the skeptic, "the rabbi knows I'm here and he is going to kill me."

Instead the rabbi put the axe in his belt, exited his small house, and walked deep into the woods. The skeptic followed and watched the rabbi fell a tree, chop it into logs, and then chop some of the logs more finely into sticks. The rabbi then bundled the wood and placed it into the large sack, which he took from his greatcoat. He then dragged the sack of wood even more deeply into the forest to a small hut where a poor widow lived.

The rabbi knocked on the door. "Who is there?" cried the widow. "It is Ivan," said the rabbi, "Ivan the woodcutter. I have heard that you are ill, and it is very cold, so I have brought you some wood." The woman opened the door and, from behind the tree where he was hiding, the skeptic heard the woman say, "I have no money to pay for wood." She coughed. "My son is looking for work in the next town, but he has found none," she said. The rabbi, alias Ivan, said, "He will find work soon; then you will pay. Plenty of time." The rabbi then entered the widow's hut. Through the window, the skeptic saw him light a fire, give the woman a crust of bread from his pocket, and then exit the house.

At daybreak, when the Jews were going to synagogue for morning prayers, they once again encountered the skeptic. "Well," one said to him, "our beloved rabbi went to heaven last night. Next year will surely be a little better for us. But you don't believe us, do you?" he asked.

Quietly the skeptic said, "Yes, I do. He went to heaven, if not higher. In fact, I saw him do it."

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Concern for others promotes healthy relationships. Society functions more effectively when individuals help one another in their daily interactions. This is particularly apparent in organizations. Many productive management practices, like empowerment, mentoring, and teambuilding, have an altruistic component. Researchers use the term *organizational citizenship behavior* to describe routine altruistic acts that increase productivity and build trusting

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relationships.¹⁷ Examples of organizational citizenship behavior include an experienced machine operator helping a newcomer master the equipment, a professor teaching a class for a colleague on jury duty, and an administrative assistant working over break to help a coworker meet a deadline. Such acts play an important if underrecognized role in organizational success. Much less work would get done if members refused to help out. Take the case of the new machine operator. Without guidance, he or she may flounder for weeks, producing a number of defective parts and slowing the production process. Caring behaviors also break down barriers of antagonism between individuals and departments. Communication and coordination increase, leading to better overall results. You can determine your likelihood to engage in organizational citizenship behavior by completing the instrument in Box 1.3.

Self-Assessment**Box 1.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale****Instructions**

Take the following test to determine your willingness to engage in altruistic behavior in the work setting. Respond to each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never engage in this behavior*) to 5 (*nearly always engage in this behavior*). Reverse the scale where indicated, so that it ranges from 5 (*never engage in this behavior*) to 1 (*nearly always engage in this behavior*). Generate a total by adding up your scores. Maximum possible score: 80.

1. Help other employees with their work when they have been absent.
2. Exhibit punctuality in arriving at work on time in the morning and after lunch and breaks.
3. Volunteer to do things not formally required by the job.
4. Take undeserved work breaks. (Reverse)
5. Take the initiative to orient new employees to the department even though it is not part of the job description.
6. Exhibit attendance at work beyond the norm; for example, take fewer days off than most individuals or fewer than allowed.
7. Help others when their work load increases (assist others until they get over the hurdles).

8. Coast toward the end of the day. (Reverse)
9. Give advance notice if unable to come to work.
10. Spend a great deal of time in personal telephone conversations. (Reverse)
11. Do not take unnecessary time off work.
12. Assist others with their duties.
13. Make innovative suggestions to improve the overall quality of the department.
14. Do not take extra breaks.
15. Willingly attend functions not required by the organization but that help its overall image.
16. Do not spend a great deal of time in idle conversation.

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EVALUATION

Altruism has much to offer. First, concern for others is a powerful force for good. It drives people to volunteer to care for the dying, teach prisoners, act as Big Brothers and Sisters, provide medical relief, and answer crisis calls. Clinical psychologist Kathleen Brehony found hundreds of cases of what she calls “ordinary grace”—average men and women doing extraordinary good on a daily basis.¹⁸ She describes, for example, one 72-year-old woman who rises at 4:30 every morning to deliver food and clothing donations to poverty-stricken Native Americans in the Phoenix area. A retired Air Force physician reduces the isolation of chronically ill children around the country by providing them with computers.

Second, following the principle of caring helps prevent ethical abuses. We’re much less likely to take advantage of others through accounting fraud, stealing, cheating, and other means if we put their needs first. (We’ll return to this theme in our discussion of servant leadership in Chapter 7.) Third, altruistic behavior, as we’ve seen, promotes healthy relationships and organizations. There are practical benefits to acting in a caring manner. Fourth, altruism lays the foundation for high moral character. Many personal virtues, like compassion, hospitality, generosity, and empathy, reflect concern for other people. Finally, altruism is inspiring. When we hear of the selfless acts of Gandhi,

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Desmond Tutu, and the Rwandans who risked their lives to save their neighbors from genocide, we are moved to follow their example.

While compelling, altruism suffers from serious deficiencies. All too often our concern for others only extends to our immediate family, neighbors, or communities.¹⁹ Sadly, well-intentioned attempts to help others can backfire. They fail to meet the need, have unintended negative consequences, or make the problem worse. For example:

- Panhandlers use the money they collect from compassionate passers-by to feed their drug habits.
- A large proportion of the money donated to some charities pays for fund-raising costs rather than client services.
- Wealthy nations fail to follow through on their pledges to provide money for disaster relief, sparking bitterness and resentment in victims.
- Medicines donated for rural health care in a developing nation are stolen and sold on the black market.
- Recipients of welfare assistance become dependent on it.
- Buying children out of slavery increases the slave trade by making it more profitable for the slavers.

Altruism is not an easy principle to put into practice. For every time we stop to help a stranded motorist, we probably pass by several others that need assistance. Our urge to help out a coworker is often suppressed by our need to get our own work done or to meet a pressing deadline. Common excuses for ignoring needs include: (1) Somebody else will do it so I don't need to help; (2) I didn't know there was a problem (deliberately ignoring evidence of poverty, domestic violence and other problems); (3) I don't have the time or energy; (4) I don't know enough to help; (5) People deserve what they get (disdain for those who need help); (6) It won't matter anyway because one person can't make much of a difference; and (7) What's in it for me? (looking for personal benefit in every act).²⁰ There's also disagreement about what constitutes loving behavior. For example, firing someone can be seen as cruel or as caring. This act may appear punitive to outsiders. However, terminating an employee may be in that person's best interests. For someone who is not a good fit for an organization, being fired can open the door to a more productive career.

Implications

- Mastering widely used ethical theories greatly enhances your chances of success as an ethical change agent.
- Each ethical perspective has its weaknesses, but each makes a valuable contribution to moral problem solving.
- Whenever possible, apply a variety of ethical approaches when faced with a moral dilemma. Doing so will help you generate new insights into the issue.

- Utilitarian decisions are based on their consequences. The goal is to select the alternative that achieves the greatest good for the greatest number of people. To apply Utilitarian principles, identify all the possible courses of actions, estimate the direct and indirect costs and benefits of each option, and select the alternative that produces the greatest amount of good based on the cost-benefit analysis.
- Kant's Categorical Imperative is based on the premise that decision makers should do what's morally right no matter what the consequences. Moral choices flow out of a sense of duty and are those that we would want everyone to make. Always respect the worth of others when making ethical decisions.
- Justice as Fairness Theory provides a set of guidelines for resolving disputes over the distribution of resources. Assure that everyone in your organization has certain rights like freedom of speech and thought, the same chance at positions and promotions, and receives adequate training to qualify for these roles. Excess benefits should go to the least advantaged organizational members.
- Communitarianism encourages the creation and transmission of shared moral values. Focus on your responsibilities, not your rights. Make choices that promote the common good. Create an organizational community marked by commitment, competence, contribution, collaboration, continuity, conscience, and conversation.
- Altruism seeks to benefit the other person, not the self. By making caring for others the ethical standard, you can encourage practices (empowering, mentoring, teambuilding, organizational citizenship behavior) that build trust and increase productivity.

Application Projects

1. Reflect on one of your ethical decisions. Which approach(es) did you use when making your determination? Evaluate the effectiveness of the approach(es) as well as the quality of your choice. What did you learn from this experience?
2. Form a group and develop a list of behaviors that are always right and behaviors that are always wrong. Keep a record of those behaviors that were nominated but rejected by the team and why. Report your final list, as well as your rejected items, to the rest of the class. What do you conclude from this exercise?
3. Join with classmates and imagine that you are behind a veil of ignorance. What principles would you use to govern society and organizations?
4. Rate your organization on the seven core processes of organizational communities. Which characteristics does it possess? Which does it need to develop? How can your organization become more like the ideal? What steps should it take?
5. During a week, make note of all the altruistic behavior you witness in your organization. How would you classify these behaviors? What impact do they have on your organization? How would your organization be different if people didn't engage in organizational citizenship behavior? Write up your findings.

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6. Write a case study based on an individual or group you admire for its altruistic motivation. Provide background and outline the lessons we can learn from this person or persons.
7. Apply all five ethical perspectives presented in the chapter to the Chapter End Case. Keep a record of your deliberations and conclusions using each one. Did you reach different solutions based on the theory you used? Were some of the perspectives more useful in this situation? Are you more confident after looking at the problem from a variety of perspectives? Write up your findings.

CHAPTER END CASE

Truro's DNA Dragnet

In January 2002, former fashion writer Christa Worthington was stabbed to death in the small coastal town of Truro, Massachusetts. One important clue to the killer's identity was the presence of semen on her body. After searching in vain for her murderer for 3 years, state and local police decided to gather DNA samples from all 790 of the village's full-time male residents. They hoped to identify the person who had sex with Worthington shortly before her death, even if he wasn't the killer. Police fanned out to local businesses, the town dump, and other locations to gather cheek swabs.

The decision to conduct a DNA dragnet divided the town's male population. Some were outraged. They contacted the police and the American Civil Liberties Union to protest and threatened litigation. Resisters viewed the DNA sweep as an invasion of privacy and worried that their samples wouldn't be destroyed as promised if they didn't match the evidence. Other men considered it their civic duty to be tested and came to the police station voluntarily.

Town residents faced significant pressure to cooperate. Police recorded the license plate numbers of those men who refused to provide DNA. Social sanctions were also applied to resisters. "I wish I could be bold enough to refuse," reported a Truro Little League coach. "[But] it's a difficult situation. It's a small town. . . . The word gets out. You already hear who has refused."¹

Truro's DNA dragnet is part of a larger trend. More such collections are being held as testing becomes cheaper and faster. In Baton Rouge, police swabbed 1,200 men and some of the samples entered the state of Louisiana's crime database. In the largest sweep, conducted to identify a serial killer in Miami, authorities tested 2,300 men.

DNA dragnets in the United States have a low success rate. Of 19 publicized sweeps, only one (limited to 25 workers at a nursing home) resulted in a conviction. The rate of success in Britain, where the procedure is more common and the public less resistant, has been higher. Twenty percent of British DNA sweeps have produced matches leading to suspects and often convictions.

Even proponents of DNA dragnets acknowledge that such tactics pose significant ethical dilemmas. According to a spokesperson of the Baton Rouge police: "Let's face it. If we took a DNA sample from every male child at birth, we could solve a lot of crimes. But is that a price we're willing to pay?"²

In April 2005 a suspect was charged with Worthington's murder after his DNA matched the sample collected from the crime scene. The accused lived in a nearby town and had been the victim's trash collector. His DNA had been collected, not as a result of the sweep, but after he had attracted the attention of the police when he was charged with threatening a girlfriend.

DISCUSSION PROBES

1. Would you voluntarily submit to the DNA test if you were a male resident of Truro? Why or why not?
2. What rights and values are in conflict here?
3. How could each ethical perspective discussed in the chapter be applied to the case? Do you reach different conclusions about the ethics of DNA dragnets based on the ethical approach you take?
4. Should organizations (business, civic associations, schools) encourage their members to participate in DNA sweeps like the one in Truro?
5. What guidelines should be created to guide local police and other law enforcement agencies conducting DNA searches?
6. Why do you think Americans are more resistant than the British to this procedure?
7. Do you think the United States will ever develop a national DNA database that includes all citizens? Would you support such a system? Why or why not?

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