

THE VIRTUOUS ORGANIZATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Even though the concept of virtues may seem more at home in philosophy, religion, and social services than in the for-profit world of business, *The Virtuous Organization* focuses on virtuous practices in work contexts. Much attention has been paid to values in organizations, of course, but the definition and roles played by virtues in organizations differ from values. We briefly discuss the concept of virtues in organizations and differentiate it from the concept of values with which it is sometimes confused. This will serve as a backdrop to the contributions made by the various chapters contained in this book.

What are Virtues?

Until recently the concept of virtue has been out of favor in the scientific community. Virtues have been traditionally viewed as relativistic, culture-specific, and associated with social conservatism, religious or moral dogmatism, and scientific irrelevance (Chapman and Galston, 1992; MacIntyre, 1984; Schimmel, 1997). Scholarly research has not only paid scant attention to virtues, especially in organizations, but also has remained largely undiscussable among practicing managers faced with economic pressures and stakeholder demands.

Walsh *et al.* (2003), for example, surveyed the appearance of terms depicting virtue in the business press. They found that virtues are largely ignored as topics associated with business performance. In an analysis of word usage in the *Wall Street Journal* from 1984 through 2000, Walsh *et al.* reported that the appearance of terms such as “win,” “advantage,” and “beat” had risen more than four-fold over that 17-year period, whereas terms such as “virtue,” “caring,” and “compassion” seldom appeared at all. Moreover, their appearance had remained negligible across the 17-year period. Although organizations, as well as individuals, aspire to be virtuous (e.g., honest, caring, courageous), such concepts have been replaced by more morally neutral terms in organizational studies such as corporate social responsibility, prosocial behavior, and employee morale (McNeely and Meglino, 1994; George, 1991; Piliavin and Charng, 1990). One result of this neutralizing of the language of organizational studies is that there has been little systematic investigation of the expression and effects of virtue in organizations. The attributes of organizations “that move individuals toward better citizenship, responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5) have been largely absent from empirical investigations in organizational studies.

The concept of virtue has been defined in a variety of ways in the literature but mainly as a link to meaningful life purpose (Becker, 1992; Overholster, 1999) or a transcendent principle that ennobles

human beings (Eisenberg, 1990; Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt, 1999). For example, in early Greek culture virtue was associated with personal health and flourishing (Weiner, 1993; Nussbaum, 1994) and that which leads to health, happiness, transcendent meaning, and resilience in suffering (Ryff and Singer, 1998; Myers, 2000a,b). Virtue also has been defined as an attribute of personal character, and it possesses cognitive, affective, volitional, and behavioral characteristics (Peterson, 2003; Nodding, 1984; Doherty, 1995). Still another view of virtue is a quality of psychological strength, “moral muscle,” or willpower that promotes stamina in the face of challenges (Emmons, 1999; Seligman, 1999; Baumeister and Exline, 1999, 2000).

At the aggregate level, virtue has been treated as embedded in communities, cultures, and organizations, and being virtuous has meant adhering to the highest qualities of the social system of which one is a part (Jordan and Meara, 1990; Roberts, 1988). Virtuousness, in this sense, is the internalization of moral rules that produces social harmony (Baumeister and Exline, 1999). Because the concept of virtue captures the highest aspirations of human beings (Peterson and Seligman, 2000), the study of virtue is a study of the capacity, attributes, and reserve in organizations that facilitate the expression of positive deviance among organization members (Cameron, 2003). This area of study includes not only an examination of extraordinary outcomes (e.g., the best of the human condition) but also the extraordinary behaviors within organizations that may lead to positive outcomes (Sandage and Hill, 2001; Dutton *et al.*, 2002).

Virtues in organizations appear to have at least five attributes (Cameron, 2003):

- (1) Virtues foster a sense of meaning, well-being, and ennoblement in human beings.
- (2) Virtues are experienced cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally.
- (3) Virtues foster harmony in relationships.
- (4) Virtues are self-reinforcing and positively deviation amplifying.
- (5) Virtues serve a buffering function and foster resilience.

These attributes differentiate virtues from the concept of values, which serve different functions in individuals and organizations.

A Shift to Virtues

Psychologist Martin Seligman, the primary founder of the Positive Psychology movement, reported that 99 percent of research in the last 50 years has neglected the positive virtuous aspects of people in favor of an emphasis on human dysfunction (Seligman, 2002). Luthans *et al.* (2002) have explained that the shift toward Positive Psychology is a response to the over-emphasis of the field over the years on what is wrong with the people. This has led to collaborative work centered at the University of Nebraska on both a positive approach to Organizational Behavior in general as well as to leadership specifically that recognizes more virtuous considerations such as optimism and hope.

Similarly, a research center at the University of Michigan has been formed which examines Positive Organizational Scholarship, or that which leads to the development of human strength, resiliency, and healing; cultivates extraordinary individual and organizational performance; leads to flourishing outcomes and the best of the human condition; and fosters and enables virtuous behaviors and emotions such as compassion, forgiveness, dignity, respectful encounters, optimism, integrity and positive affect (Cameron *et al.*, 2003). Results of this research have included investigations of the impact of virtues on organizational performance as well as on individual cognitions and physical well-being (Dutton and Ragins, 2006; Cameron and Lavine, 2006).

Still another group of scholars at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has written extensively about virtues and their effects on leaders and organizations (cf. Manz *et al.* 2001, 2003, 2004; Marx *et al.*, in press). Drawing from ancient scripture as a rich source of inspiration with its emphasis on virtuous aspects of struggling with the human condition, six virtues were identified by these writers. These virtues — faith, courage, compassion, integrity, justice and wisdom — related well to exemplary cases of positive contemporary leadership and action at work (Manz *et al.* 2001, 2006).

This book focuses on this new, yet as old as recorded history, emerging set of concepts that can be referred to as virtues. The concept of virtues is also very consistent with the growing emphasis on spirituality in the workplace, a primary focus of the recently established journal — the *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* — where much of the content of this book originally appeared in a special issue on “Values and Virtues in Organizations” as journal articles. Virtues have recently become topics of serious examination among organizational researchers and progressive companies who are exploring their role in creating new, more holistic, healthy and humane work environments.

Values

The concept of *value* has long been assigned an important role in the organization literature. Hofstede (1980, p. 19) has defined the term value as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others”. Individuals as well as organizations have values. At the individual level a value can be described as “a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence — that is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Values help to identify appropriate goals and behaviors (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987) as well as roles. Values emerge over time and are affected by family, work units, societies, and national cultures. And, much empirical evidence confirms that values significantly affect behavior and attitudes at work (Gamble and Gibson, 1999).

At the organizational level, values represent the beliefs and attitudes that permeate the organization. Values are a key part of defining an organization. They help shape its culture (Schein, 1985; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1996) and identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Values also link organization members in ways that can facilitate the achievement of goals (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998).

Shifts in dominant values have occurred in organizations over the last 50 years or so; at least four major shifts can be identified (Cameron and Quinn, 2006). The early organizational literature

emphasized traditional business values such as efficiency, control, specialization, and rationality (Weber, 1947). These values were highly effective in helping organizations achieve efficient, reliable, smooth-flowing, and predictable output, especially in relatively stable environments. A turn in dominant organizational values also occurred toward market mechanisms, mainly monetary exchange. That is, the major values focused on transactions (exchanges, sales, contracts) designed to create competitive advantage. Profitability, competitiveness, bottom line results, strength in market niches, stretch targets, and secure customer bases supplemented the more traditional values (Williamson, 1975; Ouchi, 1981) and became dominant in organizations. Still later, shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and a sense of we-ness began to achieve prominence. Instead of traditional rules and procedures or the competitiveness of profit centers, typical values focused on teamwork, employee involvement, and corporate commitment (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Lincoln *et al.*, 1980). Finally, the hyper-turbulent, complex, accelerating environments of the 21st century led to still another shift in values toward innovative and pioneering initiatives. Organizations and leaders emphasized developing new products and services and preparing for the future, and the major task of management became to foster entrepreneurship, creativity, adaptation, innovativeness and activity on the cutting edge (DeGraff and Lawrence, 2002; Tushman and O'Reilly, 1997).

These value shifts have not resulted in any set of values being predominant in organizations, and all are represented in the organizational studies literature. However, the point we are making is that whereas values have been extensively investigated, virtues have not been, even though the two terms are sometimes confused. That is, the contemporary management research literature has largely neglected the virtuous aspects of human nature.

The Virtuous Organization began with the development of a series of questions that invited response. How might the concept of virtue be best defined relative to organizational contexts, and how does it relate to the concept of value? What are the key dimensions or manifestations of virtues? Can virtues be recognized, assessed or enabled at the group

or organization level of analysis, or are virtues strictly individualistic? How do we identify, characterize and select virtues for organizational purposes? How can traditional business values and virtues work together in the workplace? What is the relationship between virtues and various kinds of individual and organizational performance? How might an emphasis on organizational virtues contribute to effective teamwork and leadership? What role can organizational virtues play in establishing organizational culture that provides deeper meaning and purpose for its members? How might the presence of virtues in organizations help avoid ethical failures such as those that occurred at Enron or World Com? What organizational dynamics are associated with virtues in organizations? What contemporary examples exist of organizations and leaders emphasizing virtues and what outcomes do they experience?

The editors of this book wanted to bring together many of the leading scholars in the field for this groundbreaking effort. We think the contributions made in *The Virtuous Organization* are valuable and help to take a step forward in understanding and being able to utilize the concept of virtues in organizations. These chapters exemplify the variety of viable approaches and perspectives which are seen as important for addressing the breadth and scope of where virtues can touch, support, and shape organizational life. Thus, the contributors to this book offer their observations in several formats: research reports, more applied chapters, essays, and interviews. We organized the book into three sections connecting with the idea of virtues in organizations during crisis, ordinary, and exemplary times. More specifically this book addresses the following overall purpose:

Historically emphasis on traditional business values such as efficiency, control, and profitability, seem to have helped organizations to achieve competitiveness and financial success. At the same time, many would say they are inadequate alone for guiding organizations into the future in a healthy and sustainable way. In addition, when pursued unchecked without being balanced by other kinds of higher level values (virtues) they can contribute to the emergence of broad scale corporate scandal. This volume provides a range of conceptual thinking, research studies, and practical applications that provide

insights about how “virtuous management”(based on transcendent values such as compassion, forgiveness and integrity) can help organizations succeed in achieving valuable and meaningful results that extend beyond financial success during:

- (a) *Crises — such as threats to the organization and its environment or scandalous leader behavior.*
- (b) *Ordinary times — absence of immediate crises or unusual prosperity and progress but with ongoing corporate and societal challenges.*
- (c) *Exemplary times — such as when significant opportunities are at hand and unusual prosperity or healthy progress is being enjoyed.*

Note that the book is designed to enable readers to select specific chapters or sections that can be read independent of the rest of the volume. While this enables the book to serve as a useful reference it may create some redundancy in points in section and chapter introductions.

The Virtuous Organization and Crises

Powley and Cameron introduce the topic of virtuousness in the chapter “Organizational Healing: Lived Virtuousness Amidst Organizational Crisis.” They present a case study of the occupants of a university building who are traumatized by a gunman. Based on extensive interview data, four primary themes are identified as essential for organizational healing and how virtuousness can be enacted under such circumstances.

The next chapter by Rhee *et al.*, “Making Sense of Organizational Actions with Virtue Frames and its Links to Organizational Attachment,” examines another traumatic event: the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City. This study introduces the concept of virtue frames as a construct for understanding members’ sense making experience, both cognitive and emotional, in response to the virtuousness of organizational actions.

Bright *et al.*, in “Forgiveness from the Perspectives of Three Response Modes: Begrudgement, Pragmatism and Transcendence” present an empirical analysis of the virtue “forgiveness” and how it

can function not only as a healing mechanism, but also as a “life-giving, positive, uplifting” force in an organizational setting. Interview data are drawn from employees of an organization burdened with long-term union-management conflict. From this, the authors develop a five Phase Model of Forgiveness.

Finally, the essay chapter “The Spiritual Challenges of Power, Humility and Love as Offsets to Leadership Hubris” emanates from Andre Delbecq’s work with executives in Silicon Valley. Many of these executives sought a more spiritual and virtuous approach to their work, but often found themselves tempted by arrogance and dominance — the two dimensions of hubris. Delbecq explores how even well-intentioned leaders can be seduced by the trappings of power and how the offsetting virtues of humility and love can negate the circumstances that lead into hubris.

The Virtuous Organization and Ordinary Times

Having identified virtuousness in organizations as a concept of increasing interest and importance to management scholars, it only follows that management educators will be attempting to examine how to “teach” these concepts to their students and/or employees. In “The Language of Virtues: Toward an Inclusive Approach for Integrating Spirituality in Management Education,” Manz *et al.* address the critical issue of language when speaking about spirituality as it relates to virtuousness in the workplace. They suggest that personal sources of virtuous behavior in organizations include religious, ethical, legal, and humanistic origins. The language of virtues is suggested as a way of speaking that includes the individual sources of spirituality at work but translates these sources into actions that can be implemented by the organization as a whole.

Next, in their chapter “Leveraging Psychological Capital in Virtuous Organizations: Why and How?,” Carolyn Youssef and Fred Luthans provide an engaging discussion of the important role that psychological capital plays in the manifestation of virtuousness in organizations during crises, ordinary and exemplary times. In particular, they view psychological capital as being based on psychological resources

such as optimism, hope, resilience and efficacy and review research that supports its potential benefits for the firm's bottom line. They suggest that psychological capital can be effectively developed during the relative stability of ordinary times and consequently help the organization to maintain a virtuous stance during more volatile periods.

In the chapter, "Europe Versus Asia: Truth Versus Virtue" cultural scholar Geert Hofstede reflects on the values which exemplify West and East differences in social history and their effect on both short-term and long-term understandings of "a way of life." This has implications for the identification and understanding of virtue. Hofstede considers this impact on the thinking and actions of science, management and government.

Joseph Maciariello's 2005 interviews with Peter Drucker serve as the focus of the next chapter. "Peter Drucker on Mission-Driven Leadership and Management in the Social Sector: Interviews and Postscript" offers Drucker's insights "into the problems and erroneous promise of the social sector in America." This section of the chapter is followed with another interview undertaken especially to address the theme of this book. Drucker gets to the heart of the social sector and the need to create balanced organizations emphasizing virtuous purposes while still being held accountable for results.

The section concludes with Nancy Adler's chapter "Corporate Global Citizenship: Successfully Partnering with the World." Adler offers a vision and a challenge for CEOs and the largest global organizations to use their resources and influence in the spirit of positive global citizenship. She provides several examples of how virtuous organizations can work with governments, other companies and communities to help make "The Virtuous Organization" a reality. She points to significant results from such worthwhile partnerships that can yield more peace, reduced poverty and an improved environment, all while achieving profitability.

The Virtuous Organization and Exemplary Times

In all corners of the world, we periodically face difficult and destructive events. However, by no means are virtues to be understood as

only important or applicable in times of crisis (during great challenge or suffering), or in the more “ordinary” times in our work and lives. Indeed, virtues can unleash significant forces for creating much good in our organizations and in the world at large during times of special opportunity and possibilities — what we describe as “exemplary times.” This section includes chapters that address virtue in both theory and practice that elucidate potential ways to help establish and/or benefit from such exemplary times.

In “Virtuous Leadership: A Theoretical Model and Research Agenda,” Pearce *et al.* examine the nature of virtuous leadership by defining it as “influencing and enabling others to pursue righteous and moral goals for themselves and their organization.” They articulate emotional, conceptual and moral components to virtuous leadership and discuss three organizational outcomes that have been shown to result from such an approach.

The chapter by Ian Mitroff and Donna Mitroff, “Spirituality in Action: The Fred Rogers’ Way of Managing Through Lifelong Mentoring” examines the philosophy and legacy of Fred Rogers of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.” The authors, through first-hand experience with Rogers, examine his role in starting the formation of healthy values in children and then translate Fred Rogers’ ideas into seven principles aimed at developing healthy adult managers and vital organizations.

In “The Positive Potential of Tempered Radicals” Rand Quinn and Debra Meyerson examine the connection between the Positive Organizational Scholarship notion of positive deviance and the complementary influences of organizational members who spearhead change processes through both an inside and outside organizational role. These so-called “Tempered Radicals” seek to make a sustainable positive difference through constructive incremental and subtle strategies that are founded on integrity and healthy influence.

In the next chapter, we are privy to a conversation with *Fortune* magazine senior journalist, Marc Gunther and Judi Neal, founder of the International Association for Spirit at Work. Neal gives background to and a follow-up interview of Gunther on the role of virtues in leadership. A case study of CEO Ricardo Levy exemplifies the application of

virtuousness in the organization and provides the core focus of the follow-up interview. Neal's final questions expand Gunther's thoughts about the importance of virtue in organizations.

The section ends with Rosabeth Moss Kanter's chapter "The Corporate Conduct Continuum: From 'Do No Harm' to 'Do Lots of Good'." Kanter makes a direct connection between economic considerations and values. Beyond acknowledging increasing societal expectations for good corporate citizenship, she shares exemplary cases of companies who have succeeded both financially and in terms of service to their communities and the world at large. Ultimately, the chapter provides insights about how corporate conduct might be assessed in terms of its integrity and positive engagement with its societal context.

After the three primary sections of this book — *The Virtuous Organization and Crises, Ordinary Times, and Exemplary Times* — David Whetten provides a final comment in his chapter "Reflections on What Matters Most." After providing a new preamble, he offers his 2000 Academy of Management Presidential Address "What Matters Most" for consideration in relation to the notion of "The Virtuous Organization." This final chapter is an especially fitting way to end the book as it reminds us that organizations consist of flesh-and-blood people who create the character of their institutions one relationship and one act at a time. It brings us back to earth and poses a challenge for all of us to consider our own role in allowing virtuousness to exist in organizational life. Whether we choose positive acts of noteworthy integrity that set an example for those we encounter throughout our work days and careers or simply greet and support a newcomer with compassion and a welcoming demeanor, in the end the realization of "The Virtuous Organization" begins with each of us.

Together the chapters in this book broaden the linkages between virtuousness and organizational outcomes during crises, ordinary and exemplary times. They help to refine definitions of virtue in several aspects of organizational endeavor and offer a series of initial attempts to encourage further theory building, empirical assessment, and application of virtuousness in the organization. They also encourage

deeper thinking and reflection about how virtues can affect various organizational activities and outcomes as we move further into the 21st Century.

Hopefully this volume will help move the literature, and ultimately practice, toward a clearer language and multiple perspectives for addressing organizational virtues. Such an undertaking promises to shift thinking in significant ways about living, working, leading and organizing. It may help lay the foundation for bold action based on deeply held beliefs and values regardless of the situation.

As a consequence, workplace behavior and values may eventually become more congruent with the best of what is asserted in homes and communities and present a greater good for all. Indeed, when we and our organizations embrace the concept of virtue we may be better equipped to understand and work in whole new ways with an enhanced sense of authenticity, productivity and much needed wisdom.

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