

BOOK REVIEW

# ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE: TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

By CRAIG E. JOHNSON

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Paperback, 334 pages

It is virtually impossible to listen to a news report, read a newspaper or magazine, or surf the Internet without the focus involving a scandal in government, a corporation, an organization or institution. The recent home mortgage collapse and the freezing up of credit markets around the world left taxpayers paying for cleaning up the financial mess caused by the immoral actions and greed of business leaders. It has only increased the already intense concerns about improving the moral behavior of organizations and those who run them. Many of our nation's elite corporations have ethical codes of conduct and code books to direct them. Unfortunately, often the leaders of these organizations either don't know how to implement their policies or, worse yet, may not believe in them. For this reason Johnson calls for an ethical transformation of organizations. *Business Ethics: A Practical Approach* is his attempt to provide organizations and their leaders and followers with tools that will help them place "ethics at the center of the workplace, significantly altering attitudes, thinking, communication, behavior, culture, and systems" (p. xv).

His book is a roadmap for those who have the courage to implement significant long-lasting positive change in their organizations. Chapter One introduces five common ethical theory approaches found in organizations, which Johnson applies later throughout the book. He encour-

ages individuals to apply more than one theory to an ethical dilemma, allowing leaders to test their perceptions through five lenses. The five ethical theories he brings forward for application include Utilitarianism (choosing the option that involves the greatest good for the greatest

Because “very bright people make very stupid mistakes” (p. 66), Johnson spends several chapters discussing decision-making models and approaches. He builds on James Rest’s idea that moral choice involves moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character by action. He revisits the idea of a dark side of our personalities and asks us to be weary of those contributors to (defective) poor decision making, e.g., insecurities, greed, and ego. He introduces us to guidelines for assistance in making improved moral decisions. He reviews several models for decision making, including Kidder’s nine ethical checkpoints.

Johnson emphasizes the centrality of communication in the transformation process. Key is the understanding that listening is more important than speaking. He admonishes us to be aware of those around us, acknowledging them and giving them value. We should be cognizant of those in our sphere of influence and Johnson reminds us that “the exercise of influence is not an option in the workplace. We must influence others if we are to fulfill our roles” (p. 115). He reminds the reader that there can be danger in having a position of influence or power leading to unethical behavior. We should use power judiciously and as Johnson states, “seek to serve others, use positional power with caution, be open to influence, and empower others” (p. 136).

The way organizations are doing business is constantly changing. Groups and teams are more involved in decision making than in the past. Since groups “tend to bring out the moral best and worst in us,” Johnson suggests that a group’s effectiveness increases when someone in the group has the courage to “stand alone” and express a minority opinion. This effectively eliminates the phenomena of group think. Johnson states that “leaders deserve a good deal of the credit for transforming ethics and a good deal of the blame when groups fall short” (p. 171). In his other book *Leadership: The Art of Making Things Happen*, Johnson (2009) states that “ethics is at the heart of leadership” (p. xvi), underscoring the burden and vital role that leaders play in groups. Both books identify many of the moral demands that both leaders and followers must adhere to. He also explores several leadership theories (styles) that enhance the performance of leaders and heavily involve followers in the decisions making process.

Johnson recognizes that often there is a dark side to organizations that needs to be confronted through truth telling. He encourages leaders to be on guard for seeking truth that leads to greater accountability

to decrease hostile working environments, sexual harassment discrimination, prejudices, and stereotyping. He gives practical solutions for each of these. Central to this is adhering to and promoting a formal code of ethics, a powerful mission and vision statement, shared values, and easily understood norms that support policies. Leaders need to be aware of the organization culture (climate) and be ready to change or modify behavior that is undermining the success of the organization. Johnson advances the idea that “ethical values are factored into every organizational activity” (p. 248). He expresses the need for “ethical consistency” throughout the organization, top to bottom. This includes the concepts espoused by Thomas et al. in their book, *Global Ethics: A Practical Approach*, (1994) and the need to “think globally” and “act locally.”

There are numerous strengths in this easy-to-read book. First, Johnson provides a plethora of current and historical world events to engage the reader and illustrate and apply concepts. These applications enhance the link from theory to practice and show what he is trying to promote in organizational ethics.

Second, there are boxes or sections termed Case Study, placed throughout the chapters as well as at the end of each chapter. These case studies, real or fictional, engage the reader to decide (make choices) about how they would act or react under the circumstances described. Discussion Probes at the end of the case study bring the reader deeper into the discussion and forces him to make ethical or moral decisions. It appears that Johnson wants the reader to begin practicing moral and ethical decision making along the journey.

Third, Johnson introduces “tips” for the reader to consider in the transformation process. These tips are intended to provide the reader with an idea of how to manage or implement a new concept or technique. In other words, take those that apply and discard those that don't. The advice provided is a great starting point for the individual who does not know where to begin.

Fourth, each chapter has a Self-Assessment Box. This is an opportunity for the reader to “look in the mirror” and measure her ability or performance. The reader may decide to measure the organization she works for, or if it is more comfortable, insert someone else's name. (But of course, ethics is always best done on oneself).

Fifth, at the end of each chapter there is a section called Application

**Projects that allows the reader to apply what he has just learned through**

that any Christian leader faces, to more foundational Christian perspectives Johnson is aware of but does not treat explicitly.

## REFERENCES

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