

International Management Ethics & Values

An example of a Journal which received a fail grade

The journal has 8 entries, and is about 2,500 words long.

The final entry does mention the journal writing process and the potential for learning from it, but there is no reference to any external sources which consider this.

The journal was written in 2007.

Introductory Comments from the tutor:

Purely for ease of writing my commentary I have chosen the male gender for the student – well, actually, I tossed a coin.

This is an example of a hard copy journal which was graded a fail. The main reason for this is, despite the student's early statement that he knows all about how to write reflective journals, this journal contains very little meaningful reflective substance. In many places it doesn't even go beyond description and in others it hardly even begins to describe. Instead it merely makes unproven statements and claims, often failing to explain let alone justify them. He says he holds strong values but these are nowhere stated, let alone questioned or analysed as to the repercussions of those values in ethical action. For the most part it hardly begins to, and completely fails to develop when it does, any wide engagement with and application of the bulk of the course material and concepts beyond two basic aspects. Similarly there is very little attempt to engage with and apply in any meaningful manner the various aspects of the course to the wider world or vice versa.

Read the journal for yourself with this in mind.

I critique in more detail its weaknesses, making suggestions as to how this journal could have been improved and the type of processes this student should have used to avoid this fail. (This additional critique is on a separate file.) But the comments are in relation to this journal and how the student should have approached this, his, journal. Your journal is yours and doesn't have to cover the things this student does.

Be warned, that critique is extensive because there's plenty of lessons to be learnt from this journal. So don't try to do it quickly – there's no easy quick fix to ethics and ethical reflection, never mind any quick fix for this specific journal.

Malcolm Keyte

05-Aug-07

Entry # 1: *Ethics and Values*

For me the study of ethics has no appeal nor do I see much value in undertaking a course concerned specifically with ethics and values. To me, you either have strong moral values and behave in an ethical manner, or you do not - the behaviour of a person will reflect this and one can judge (as is human nature) the worth of that person. This is my view. I may be entirely wrong about this and I just may learn something that will have me pulling my foot out of my mouth!

Right now this is how I see myself: I believe I have strong morals and values passed on to me from the guidance of my parents and the experience of life over the past 25 years of my short existence. I also believe I behave - in most circumstances - in an ethical and just manner. I am not naïve. I realise that I am only human and not perfect. I have made mistakes. I can recall many moments in my life where what I have done has been wrong or I have found myself questioning my actions and the reasoning behind them. Some of these moments have seen tears come unbidden to my eyes after decisions have been made that make me ask myself "Have I compromised another person's beliefs, their values?"

A reflective journal is something that I find very useful when undertaking studies. I am reminded of the first reflective journal I was required to keep back in year 12 English whilst we were reading. Ever since then I have not been able to read a novel or text without raising those where, what, how, why when questions in regards to my own thoughts and the content of what I am reading. By beginning with an introduction as to how and where I see myself now, I hope to be able to reflect upon what I have written and determine what I have learnt, if anything, and see if my views change over the length of the course.

10-Aug-07

Entry # 2: RE: *Ethics and Values*

I believe I overlooked the fact that this course is aimed at Management Ethics and Values. Therefore in terms of this revelation, I believe I may have a great deal to learn for I know little about how management deals with ethical and moral issues. There are also those questions like what determines organisations' values and moral stance? How is it written? How are issues of ethical nature dealt with in an organisation?

16-Aug-07

Entry # 3: *The Milgram Case*

I had heard of this study before but I was not aware of who was responsible for it. Turns out Stanley Milgram was the man. He conducted the experiment aimed at investigating the properties of destructive obedience. I had never really considered the implications of it before and now faced with the prospect of analysing it with regard to ethics and values I find I am a little lost.

After having read through the first few topics regarding approaches to ethical decision making I thought I had a good grasp of how they were or could be applied not only to my life decisions but the decisions made by others. Yet I do not know how to interpret the experiment by Milgram. On one side of my reasoning I ask the question would we know what we do now about obedience had the experiment not been carried out? On the other side I find myself questioning his approach to the experiment. Is he working towards his own agenda – that is a means to an end, or to the advantage of the greater good? I find myself also very curious as to the response of the participants. Would I have reacted the same way as them? Surely not for it would go against the moral of causing no unnecessary harm to others.

I do not know from which angle to approach the situation. Do I consider it a rules or results based approach for Milgram? And is it a character or

virtue approach for the participants of the study? And what of the impact on the participants? Is it detrimental to their being? I had not even thought of that.

27-Aug-07

Entry # 4: *Ethical and Moral Considerations in everyday media*

I was surprised to pick up on the lyrics of a song from the Hilltop Hoods *The Hard Road: Restrung* (2007) album. The song is called Stopping All Stations Restrung and the chorus contains the lines:

Whatever it takes can justify,
Whatever ends we make, whatever the price,
To the end of a life, it's just an observation,
So take a ride we're stopping all stations.

My first thought was to relate the first two lines to the ethical decision making approaches and specifically the results based approach (Fisher & Lovell, 2006, p. 127). I was surprised to realise that what was in the chorus of the song was something that I had only just learned the proper term for and it occurred to me, did the Hilltop Hoods realise that what they had written was a concept put to use to make decisions with regard to ethical and moral issues?

When put into context with the rest of the song I believe they did know what they were talking about for the song goes on to describe an old man faced with a group of trouble makers who threaten his life and hit a woman who comes to his aid. The woman was hit because she would not stand for the group to threaten the old man. Similarly the old man would not stand to see the woman hurt and as such exercises physical action to state his point that no man should hit a woman. Is this song not dealing with the issue of moral values, of right and wrong and standing up for what one believes to be right? This just seemed so strange to me that such a concept could be found so obviously in a song.

It is also curious to me that I should now draw relation between what I am studying and the themes of two books I have recently read. The first by

Mitch Albom is called *The Five People you meet in Heaven*. It was whilst reading this book that I came to a realisation that the choices we make through life have a profound impact on the lives of others both directly and indirectly. This is the foundation upon which the story is built. The story revolves around the life of an old veteran who, when killed in a terrible accident, begins a journey through heaven where he meets 5 people whose lives he influenced through action or inaction.

It is not a new concept, that of decisions we make affecting others directly and indirectly, but when I consider it in terms of ethics and values, it takes on a whole new dimension. I cannot help but continue to revert back to the many approaches to ethical decision making and the different perspectives one may have of the same decision.

The second book, *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris, also contains content that deals with (unsurprisingly) the issue of morality and values. He makes reference to the Ten Commandments and the value they have in terms of people basing their own morals upon. Harris also addresses the issue of the Golden Rule and its impact across several religions, for he does not focus solely on Christianity. He considers many religions and their associated value and belief systems comparing as he goes.

06-Sep-07

Entry # 5: *Milgram Case Revisited*

Based on the feedback from my marked assignment I realise that I indeed overlooked one of the approaches to ethical decision making that I should have applied to the case study – that of the Golden Rule. I do not know why I forgot about the rule, I recall reading it and it made perfect sense with regard to the actions of Milgram. But then I still have questions relating to the case. The meaning of the Golden Rule as given by Fisher & Lovell (2006, p. 143) states 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' which is very clear. The problem I have is determining if Milgram would have objected to it being done unto him by another. For if in his mind he thought

that he would have endured the experiment as administered by another, then he is just in his decision to have carried out the experiment. However, from the view of a neutral yet conscientious objector what he did was unethical – certainly from the perspective of other academics as was pointed out in the feedback.

Coming back to my own response to this case, I may not have approached it correctly. Now if I ask myself questions regarding the case I find my reply clear and concise. For example: Could I have allowed such an experiment to be carried out on me? No. Would I have then participated in administering the experiment? No. Therefore in my view and through the application of the rules can I justify that what Milgram did was unethical? Yes. It worries me that I did not see it for what it so blatantly was – a perversion of moral justification. That is not to say that I did not recognise the situation for what it was, just that I attempted to see the experiment through Milgram's perspective. Perhaps a valuable lesson.

26-Sep-07

Entry # 6: *Discussion with Housemate*

This evening I got into a discussion with my housemate regarding this ethics subject. I was explaining how since the subject began I have been finding reason to question many situations and everyday activities, analysing them from an ethics and values perspective. It was then that my housemate began to recount to me several incidences of questionable ethical behaviour by her co-workers. The situations spoken off made me question the means of analysis, additional factors and any other considerations that may have affected the decisions made that resulted in an ethical behaviour that was considered by many to have been wrong – it was in essence a moral dilemma. After some time we came to the conclusion that the decisions made were results based in nature and as such provided an outcome that was less than adequate. The outcome did not account for the impact on the client in the long term, nor did it make allowance for the impact it would have in terms

of additional costs to neither the employees nor the additional work required to rectify the situation. As such it would have been better to apply a rights based approach to the situation resulting in an outcome where both the client and company were better off.

The conversation that we had was quite good in terms of the way I was able to explain several of the ethics topics in a way that helped me to better understand what I had read as well as pass on some of the ideas to my housemate. It was during the discussion that we got onto the topic of organisation size and how a global company has different perspectives and influences with regard to what is considered right and wrong. It made me think of an employer I used to work for that had strong influences from the American parent company. The strength of the parent company's influence was quite obvious yet a management environment tailored to this country was well maintained. I believe this was done through the careful integration of international management teams that brought with them principles of management from American companies whilst following a 'when in Rome' mentality towards the people and working conditions.

09-Oct-07

Entry # 7: *Codes and standards in places of employment*

It has crossed my mind that after reviewing topics 6, 7 and 8 that I know little of the ethics program in my place of employment. This strikes me as odd, considering that in the 12 months I have been there, there has been no mention of an ethics program or specific codes of conduct that one must adhere to in the workplace. However, having said that there is a HR policy package handed out upon employment with the company, but no express focus placed on its contents, a mere sign and return sheet to be completed to say one has received the package.

This then had me thinking about how one fosters an ethics program that employees will embrace in the form of codes of conduct and ethics. When following this up I came across McNutt and Batho (2005, p. 658) who suggest

that a way to foster an environment where employees are on the same page as management with regard to morally right actions is to promote a sense of ownership, duty and obligation to the firm – along the lines of Kantian ethics, where its not the action that counts but the motive behind the action (Svensson and Wood, 2003, p. 350). This drew strong parallels with study I was undertaking in Management for Quality where I have recently been researching employee empowerment.

Empowerment is a concept where employees develop a deep sense of motivation, ownership and loyalty towards the organisation the more they are involved in the achievement of objectives and decision making (Greasley, Bryman, Dainty, Price, Soetanto and King, 2005, p. 358). I would therefore draw a conclusion that through empowerment of the employees, an organisation could build a very strong ethical foundation because employees would be involved from the very inception of any codes of conduct or ethics. An added advantage of empowerment is that it is a best practice principle that promotes continuous improvement. Maybe it is then possible to develop both best practice principles and ethics programs?

14-Oct-07

Entry # 8: *Last Entry*

I find that although some of the concepts I have not fully grasped I find that the approaches to ethical decision making are an excellent basis for most situations that require analysis.

The journal has provided me with a means to contemplate various situations that have presented themselves for me to analyse. As I mentioned in the first entry an interesting outcome of keeping a journal is the fact that now I cannot look at a situation, event or item of media without questioning the ethical content. Also, it was not until the end that I was able to fully understand the justified approach to journal entries, though I still don't quite have a grasp on how to apply it.

References

- Fisher, C & Lovell, A 2006, *Business ethics and values: Individual, corporate and international perspectives*, 2ed, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow UK
- Greasley, K., Bryman, A., Dainty, A., Price, A., Soetanto, R. & King, N., 2005, 'Employee perceptions of empowerment', *Employee Relations*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 354-368.
- McNutt, P. & Batho, C., 2005, 'Code of ethics and employee governance', *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 32, no. 8, pp. 656-666.
- Svensson, G. & Wood, G., 2003, 'The dynamics of business ethics: a function of time and culture – cases and models', *Management Decision*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 350-361