

Developing Ethics Awareness

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Abstract

Understanding, let alone, predicting the development of South-East Asian countries is impossible without exploring its complicated webs of historical, economical, social, ecological, cultural, traditional, religious, geographical, philosophical, political and ethical roots. As far as arriving at a deep understanding, I consider myself, having lived in Vietnam for over 2 years, to be just a beginner. Still, after many meetings with Vietnamese opinion leaders, business people, officials, students, expats from different continents and members of my wife's family, and family members of my Vietnamese friends, I feel entitled to have a view on the subject of ethics awareness in this part of the world. Awareness is of course an on-going thing – a continuous exploration. This paper reflects my 'current' awareness of the issue.

Despite the many setbacks, this region is developing at a fast rate. Yet, this development is under attack. Some attackers cannot be prevented, such as the terrible surprises Mother Nature has in stock (tsunami; volcano outburst; earthquake). Other attackers are of a human origin. The number one threat is corruption (in most South-East Asian countries).

When I use the word corruption, I refer to human attacks:

- political corruption: abuse of power, office or resources by government officials for personal gain, e.g. by extortion, soliciting, or bribery. This includes police corruption.
- corporate corruption: corporate criminality and the abuse of power by corporation officials for personal gain, internally and externally.

My personal belief is that both human attacks are the result result of a lack of ethics awareness, fortified by systems that do not meet modern age requirements. This not only has a negative effect on the economic development of the region, but also on issues (seemingly) as wide apart as education, foreign investments, tourism and the region's image in the world. This paper limits itself to ethics awareness. 'Systems' are not being addressed. To illustrate the issue, the author uses his own personal experience and observations. He has no academic pretense; research in this area has only just begun. It is seriously hampered by

- the legal limitations (for example, lack of freedom of speech; censorship), and
- the justified fear of *those who know & those involved* to tell the truth.

These two factors underlie what is often commonly referred to as 'sensitive issues, to be avoided in writing and public communications'. This requires a style of writing and public speaking which the author reluctantly applies. Reluctant, as he is from a country where both factors are absent, but lives and works in a country where they are dominant.

I concentrate on corruption. I don't get into the lack of ethics awareness resulting in destruction of nature, although I will be touching upon this issue. Pollution and the effective handling of it starts with ethics awareness, and when we look at the state of nature on our planet, there is still a lot of unawareness. And when there is, there is lack of responsibility to take action. This unwillingness of course has many connections with corruption, and especially, the 'corrupted mind'.

I address the issue of ethics awareness in 4 parts:

1. Statement of the problem: lack of ethics awareness causes an ongoing attack on the development of developing countries, and recovery from recession damage.
2. The current state of affairs: corruption & the Corrupted Mind.
3. Power Distance, and 'losing face'
4. Developing Ethics Awareness: a first step towards the creation of an Incorruptable Mind.

As for 3. Besides "starting at the top", I suggest an educational tool for use in the educational organizations in South-East Asian countries. This tool – a training course to develop ethics awareness and ethics skills such as making valid judgments – should have versions fit for

- elementary school, high school and college/university level education;
- in-company training programs
- public (open) training programs.

Anecdote #1: Controlling the illegal Antiques Trade

In 1976 I am the guest of a Mexican family. Alonzo, a friend of the family and a high ranking government official, shows me around. As pre-columbian art & artifacts have my warm interest, he does what he can to satisfy my curiosity, and even to fill my desire to enable me to do something any art lover wants, but which is strictly forbidden for the average visitor or tourist: to examine the antiques by holding them in my hands. In and around Mexico City Alonzo introduces me to 5 private collections of pre-columbian antiques. Collections built up by families who have been grave robbers and amateur archaeologists for many generations. My host tells me it is his job to control these illegal collections, to know what is going on in the jungles of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Yucatan, and to make sure these illegal collectors of pre-columbian artifacts don't sell too many of their finds on the black market to American museums. When I ask him why he doesn't confiscate these collections, he tells me that the Mexican government and the official museums have no possibilities to take proper care of them, and that this is just the next best solution.

Alonzo has 3 different jobs: 1. Director of the Pre-columbian collections of the Greater Mexico City (Distrito Federal), 2. Policeman (he carries a weapon and is authorized to make arrests), and 3. Reporter (he carries a 'gold press card', which allows him to enter any social gathering unannounced). Reason: the official policy of the Mexican government is to keep its national heritage from being destroyed, stolen or smuggled – particularly, to the U.S.A. The combination of these 3 jobs helped him to enforce this policy and control the illegal trade. But now and then he allows these collectors to sell some of their stock on the black market. Yes, Alonzo is a powerful man. As his former colleague, he has a direct line to the President of Mexico, Mr. Portillo.

Coming from The Netherlands I realize this situation would never be possible in my country. An official with 3 jobs who would close an eye on illegal antiques trade would lead to a national scandal, the man would be fired, and the Parliament would demand a full scale investigation.

Question: is this corruption?

1. Lack of Ethics Awareness: a permanent barrier and threat to development

Fact: the best business schools of the USA– Harvard, Yale, etc. – provided the major players in the major business scandals of the past 10 years with their best alumni. For example, Enron hired them, and gave them free reign. The Wall Street corporations hired them. The major law firms and MNC's hired them. So what went wrong? And worse, what will keep on going wrong when we don't face this fact? What is the 'missing link'?

In the 1989 movie 'Wall Street' actor Michael Douglas impressively portrays a ruthless corporate raider. The main character, Gordon Gekko, was partly based on Michael Milken, the 'Junk Bond King' of the 1980ies. His saying: "Greed is good!" became a kind of creed for those who believe that in life getting money is everything, and that any means to reach this objective is justified. Now the follow-up, 'Wall Street II' is out. Same guy, same setting. Gekko's mad genius had time to work out even more complex ways to relieve people from their money. He has twenty years to contemplate – not his sins, but how to do even 'better' when he would be released.

Apparently, no one has learnt from the scandals, the recession, the convictions of criminals like Bernard Madoff. Nearly all analyses and comments focus on the technical how of Ponzi Schemes, corporate fraud, the character and personality of those involved, laws and ethical codes being broken, and the sentences of the culprits. Some discuss how to prevent reoccurrence, by proposing new laws, policy and procedures.

In short, nearly all attention goes to the mechanics of fraud, and the people who are responsible. Yet, so far I haven't found one source who does much more than simply stating that these people are bad guys who must be prosecuted, while the procedures and laws – even after some adjustments – still allow the clever-bad guy to continue their activities.

We assume that ethics, like communication, is something we learn from our parents, and at school. Ethics education is often considered part of religious education. But as we all know, a religion forwards its own beliefs and values to its followers, be they Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu or Buddhist. They do provide some basic education in determining what is good and what is bad.

Ethics is often confused with morals. Ethics is the personal consideration of what might be good and what might be bad, and then making a decision based on the outcome of this consideration. As there is no 100% good, many people believe in a divine being, as an ideal, a representation of all-good, of perfection. Over time, people have kind of replaced or fortified religion by a divine ruler (like some Egyptian Pharaohs, or King Louis, "le Roi Soleil"), or political systems (like Italian Fascism, or German Nazism). When this divine ruler or system is seen by the believers and followers as exclusive to only them, then anyone who isn't a believer or follower, who disagrees with his or its values or denies his or its existence, or worse, ridicules him or it, some fanatic believers will wage war on the non-believers, and persecute the non-followers. Of course, when fanaticism has taken over, all sense of ethics is sacrificed. History – ancient and contemporary – has many examples. Most are short-lived (when the ruler dies). Those based on a system tend to exist longer.

Morals are rules for living, as defined by religious leaders and law makers around the world. They differ per culture, time, location, and situation. What is morally right in one culture, may be considered immoral by another.

History is littered with religious wars, between Christian and Muslims, Christians and Christians, Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Muslims, Christians and non-Christians, in Europe, in Africa and the Americas. Buddhism is the only religion that never has been involved in wars, as its basic tenet is self-improvement. So from a historical point of view and looking at the facts you could say that Buddhism is the only peace-loving religion.

Still, around the world we see many kinds of blind fanaticism, with practitioners who claim the divine or 'historical' right to distinguish right from wrong, and with it, the means to reward or punish: a form of justice based on religious conviction or ideology. This attitude blocks communication and by doing so, it lays the groundworks for acts resulting in human suffering. These acts range from denying freedom of speech to terrorism.

November 6, 2010: Shell pays a 30 million US\$ fine for bribing customs officials

In the summer of 2002 a Shell manager had had enough: every time Shell wanted to import materials for its activities in Nigeria, the customs officials would hold up the goods, saying some document was missing, or another 'story'. The manager asked a friend: "Is there a way to handle this?" There was. Bribing customs officials. All in all, Shell paid 2,5 million US\$. In the books it said: 'local negotiation fees', or 'additional costs for transportation'. There were no receipts, but the 'bills' were paid by Shell anyway. (summary of an article by Michael Persson, in De Volkskrant)

2. Corruption & the Corrupted Mind

V.L. (Vietnam): "I am living in a developing country where corruption is one of the biggest barriers to prosperity. Corruption takes away the money from where it must be spent: private houses instead of infrastructure, luxury cars instead of schools, etc. Corruption prevents business from effectiveness: long and complicated procedures to force people to pay for doing business, raising cost and discouraging investors, etc. (...) As a leader, what we can do is to adopt a pure and clean position in whatever we do (don't be corrupted, and say no to any kind of practice that directly or indirectly supports corruption) and [wherever we manifest ourselves:] company, family, group, and society. Or simply, be an anti-corruption example. Despite the disadvantages."

Anecdote #2: Being robbed in Colombia

On a long train journey in Colombia, I fall asleep. When I wake up, my travelling bag is gone. I had it fixed to my body, but someone must have used a sharp knife to cut the strap. The bag contains my camera, passport, money, diary, and personal stuff. Fortunately, I carry money in my belt, so I can continue my journey. When the train stops in La Dorada, I go to the local police station to register the robbery. The policeman sits behind his desk, looking through papers. Whatever I say fails to make him look up from his work. Then a man behind me whispers in my ears: "Pesos". I whisper back, "How much?" "Try 5". I hand the policeman a 5 pesos note, which disappears in the wink of an eye. He looks up and says, smiling: "What can I do for you?" It was as if I had thrown a coin in a toy robot. On his desk I see a small

tablet with a quote: “Administrare’sfacilarlascosasdifíciles.” In 21st Century words: “Management is simplifying complicated issues.”

All over the world we find corruption.

Transparency International is an NGO that publishes an index of political and corporate corruption in most countries. On http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_Perceptions_Index you can see the most recent index. When we look at South East Asia, we see the following rankings:

1. Singapore¹
13. Hong Kong
17. Japan
33. Taiwan
38. Brunei
39. South Korea
46. Macau
56. Malaysia
78. Thailand & China
87. India
91. Sri Lanka
110. Indonesia
116. Vietnam
134. Philippines; Bangladesh
143. Pakistan
146. Nepal
154. Cambodia; Laos
176. Myanmar

Although this index – updated yearly – is being criticized as ‘based on subjective observations’ done by yearly surveys, it does give an insight into the way a country’s degree of corruption is being perceived both by its inhabitants and by ‘professional visitors’ (business people, foreign investors, expats, diplomats). It is part of the country’s image².

History may provide some answers to important questions like, “Why?”. But let’s not get too philosophical.

From my own study and observations in Colombia (no.78 on the list), I can safely state that the downward spiral that led to more and more corruption was the result of generation upon generation of corrupt politicians, who increasingly had ties with criminal organizations. The Colombians followed the example: when the President is corrupt, when the policeman is corrupt, then why should I NOT be corrupt? “When ‘top brass’ is corrupt, I am allowed to be corrupt.”

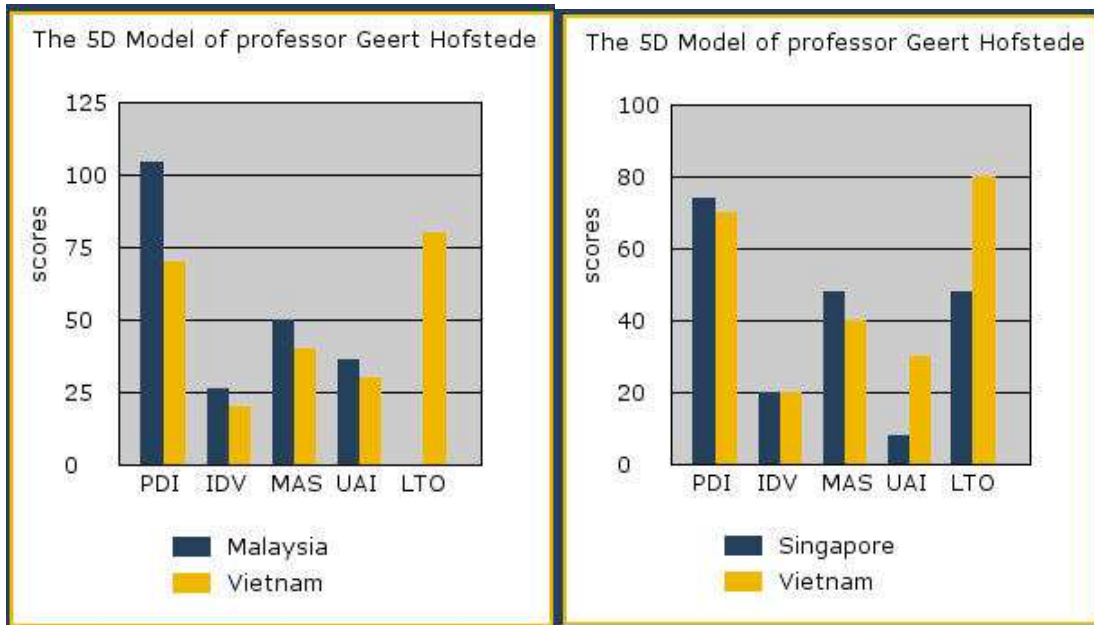
People tend to blame ‘the system’. The ‘system’ is held in place by ... people.

3. Power Distance, and ‘losing face’

¹ Gabriel Lopez (Philippines): “The exemplary leadership of Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yu may be a useful model based on the rule of law.”

² It is interesting to cross-reference with the ‘Freedom’ index on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_indices_of_freedom

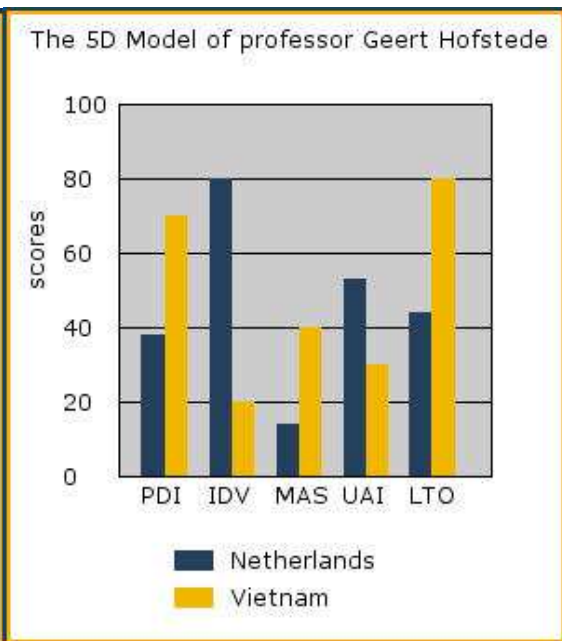
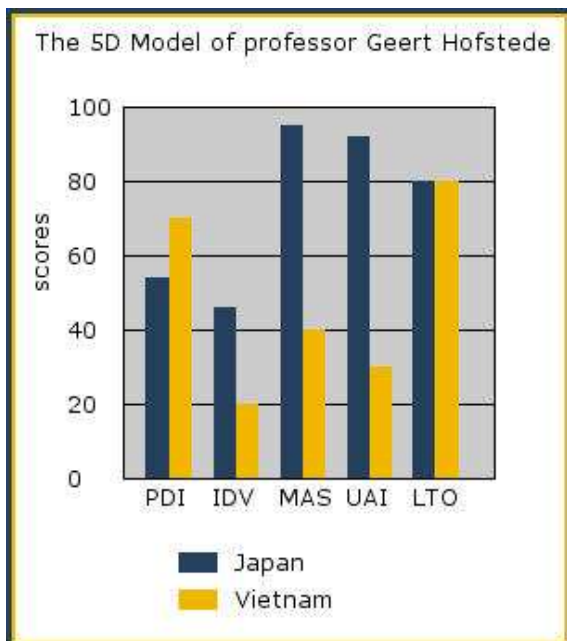
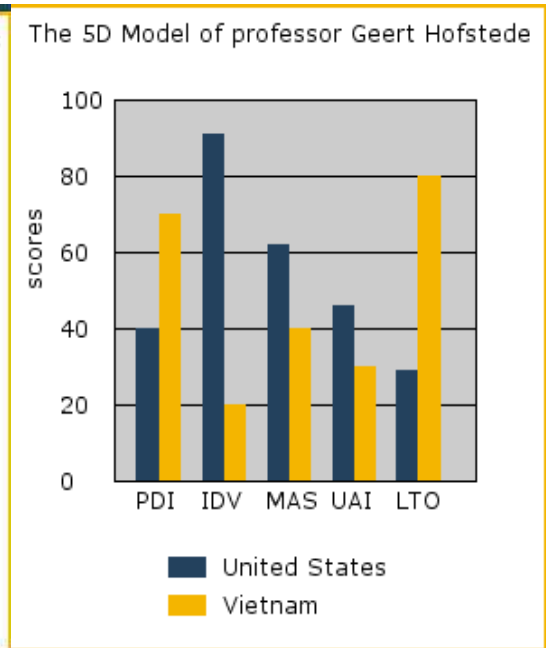
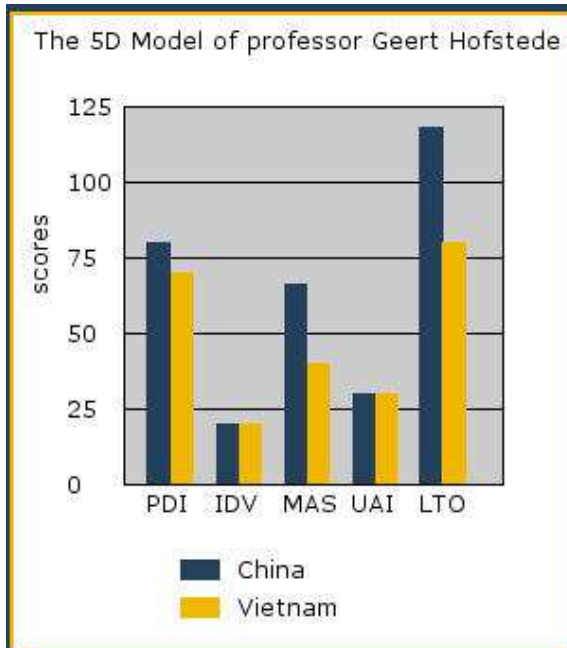
In several South East Asian countries the Confucianist idea of authority is firmly embedded in the culture. According to culture expert Prof. Geert Hofstede one of the aspects to take into consideration when examining a culture is 'Power Distance'. A large Power Distance means: the Leader is BOSS: he (usually a man) is the ultimate authority. It's hard for subordinates to talk to their boss. Bosses include teachers and fathers. A short Power Distance: it is easy to communicate with the one who holds authority. China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore all have a large Power Distance. Take a look at the 'PDI' columns³:



Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam all score high on Power Distance. When we look at their respective scores on the Corporate Corruption Index, we see that Malaysia is no. 56, Vietnam no. 116, and Singapore ... no. 1. Now, compare the PDI's of China (no. 78) and the United States (no. 22) with Vietnam. (See next page)

When considering the 'top brass example' it could be said that the ethics example of Singapore – a country ruled by an authoritarian and 'high PDI' government, and apparently 'corruption-free' – has a remarkable impact on the perception of both its citizens and the outside world. The Singapore Government is very strict when it comes to corruption, both in government and in business. In the major newspapers corruption and the resulting court cases and punishments take up quite some space. The measures taken by the US Government – democratic, relatively low PDI – after the scandals of the last decade (e.g. ENRON, politicians accepting bribes) seem to have an impact as well. The corruption cases are widely publicized. Singapore has a 70% Chinese and 20% Malaysian population. It could be said to be deeply affected by the Confucianist ethics legacy.

³ Check <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>. PDI: Power Distance; IDV: Individualism vs. Collectivism; MAS: Masculinity vs. Femininity; UAI: Uncertainty Avoidance; LTO: Longterm vs. Shortterm Orientation.



Vietnam compared with Japan (no. 17) and The Netherlands (no.7). The dimension 'IDV' stands for Individualism vs. Collectivism. Both the USA and The Netherlands score a low Power Distance, and high on Individualism.

So what could be the case when we consider corruption? Could it help us understand why in countries with a large Power Distance, combined with a more collectivist notion and *on top of that*, a heavy emphasis on the 'losing face' principle in Confucianism-influenced cultures, the role model or example set by the country's leaders make the difference?

It is at least remarkable that Singapore as the *only* South East Asian country scores not just high, but *no. 1 on the list*. Could it be the examples of its leaders these past 5 decades? Did Singapore develop a system to keep its corruption-free image in place?

Losing Face

A cultural element in South East Asian countries is 'losing face'. Of course, no one in the world likes to lose face, and making another lose face is generally considered to be bad manners. In this part of the world losing face is however a dominant principle in human relationships. Add to this the Confucianist principles of dealing with authorities and equals (see att. 1 and 2), and it may be clear that this leads to a situation where those in power will never get (or accept) criticism or corrective feedback from their subordinates.⁴ Given the fact that 'power corrupts' (see att. 3), it is no surprise that many South East Asian countries are seen as corruption-countries.

Considering the fact that Singapore is the no. 1 on that list (Hong Kong and Japan belong to the 'Top 20'), makes it a most interesting case in authoritarian leadership providing an effective ethics example.

October 20, 2010: FIFA Officials offer their vote for sale

Organizing a World Cup event can be a lucrative affair. When done well, a country – and in particular, the organizers – can make a lot of money. Although the facts about South Africa haven't all come to the surface, there are clear indications that this event was surrounded by corruption. Recently, two FIFA officials have offered their vote for a next World Cup location to potential organizing countries, like UK and Russia. As this is now public knowledge, this has severely damaged the image of both the FIFA and those countries who have been willing to accept bribery:

“Shamed FIFA duo Amos Adamu and Reynalf Temarii were last night suspended by the governing body over the cash for votes scandal. Four other high-ranked FIFA members were also carpeted after the undercover operation which showed the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups was open to corruption.

Nigerian Adamu was filmed demanding £500,000 to guarantee how he would cast his vote, while Tahitian Temarii wanted £2million, nominally for a football complex in New Zealand. Both men have denied any impropriety but after an emergency meeting of FIFA's Ethics Committee - which delayed a news conference by more than two hours - were booted off the body's Executive Committee pending a full investigation.

Four other former Ex-Co members, Africans Amadou Diakite, Slim Aloulou and Ismael Bhamjee, and Tongan Ahongalu Fusimalohi, also face the ultimate sanction after given incriminatory statements to the undercover team, suggesting as payment of £1m would be enough to buy a vote.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter insisted that the world governing body is not corrupt but said there were “devils” within football as in society.”

(Martin Lipton, on www.mirrorfootball.co.uk)

⁴ This may even be a major reason for government control of media.

4. Developing Ethics Awareness

In my opinion, effectively developing ethics awareness needs 3 steps:

1. ethics education
2. ethical decision skills
3. justice

Justice (3) is beyond the scope of this article. It is defined (Kunow, 2009) as: the concept of moral rightness based on ethics, rationality, law, natural law, religion, fairness, or equity, along with the punishment of the breach of said ethics.

Laws could be said to be the explicit agreements a nation uses to enforce its interpretations of Justice.

4.1 Ethics Education

Understanding the 'ethics' of a situation directly affects awareness of our responsibility for this situation. 'Taking responsibility' simply means, deciding to act, with the purpose to either maintain its good-ness, or handle its 'badness'.

So at the bottom of any activity is ethics: the understanding and consequently, the awareness of its degree of ethics, *and* the ability to decide and act for the 'greatest good'. What is 'the greatest good'?

I see seven areas of ethics awareness:

1. Self: personal life
2. Family
3. Group (organization; ethnic entity)
4. Nation (country)
5. Mankind
6. Nature (environment)
7. Spirituality / Eternity / Divinity

An ethical person will contemplate the impact of a decision on many if not all of these areas. Is the decision destructive or constructive? Will it be beneficial to 1 – 7? What damage will be done to 1 – 7? You could say that the ethical person carefully considers the "amount" of construction vs. destruction to arrive at a decision where there is minimal damage and maximum benefit for most if not all areas. This requires careful examination, and a clear view on the decision's consequences. This is not to say that ethical people always make sound decisions. They can make mistakes, as it is often impossible to take into account what will be happening in the future. But, if the consequences turn out differently – say, destructive – they will be willing to face them and take responsibility. This of course is a value of ethical leaders.

Here are some examples of ethical decisions. Some require an instant action / inaction, with no time to ponder over the consequences. Examples:

- the decision to build an industrial park in a nature reserve
- the decision to pay an official 'under the table' to speed up a procedure
- the decision to sell a medicine to cure cancer
- the decision to release a criminal from jail before his term is up
- the decision to invest money in oil prospecting

- the decision to pay a teacher to let student pass his exam
- the decision to destroy a forest
- the decision to kill an animal because one of its body parts is said to increase male potency
- the decision to buy stolen goods, change their appearance, and sell them as new
- the decision to cover up income from the tax authorities
- the decision to invade / conquer another country
- the decision to spread false rumors about a competitor
- the decision to break a law in order to save someone's life
- the decision to enforce the law resulting in someone losing his/her life
- the decision to drive on after you have hit someone
- the decision to keep a laptop left by a passenger in your taxi

These and many other questions could be part of an educational ethics awareness program, teaching there is 'good & bad', but no *absolute* good & bad.

Corporate Governance

When in the second half of the 19th century the Englishman Herbert Spencer developed his philosophy of ethics, he continued a tradition that had started with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, almost 2300 before his time. Nowadays, with a world that indeed has become a "global village", as Marshall McLuhan so correctly predicted over 40 years ago, we need to take a new look at ethics. That is, not at its nature: this has been unchanged since mankind rose to awareness. We need to look at its applications. And, make them practical. The various scandals of the past dozens of years have led to the development of a new field in management: Corporate Governance. However, Corporate Governance primarily concerns itself with the accountability question: who is responsible for which policy, procedure, or law, with an emphasis on fraud. It has led to corporate and even national Codes of Ethics. As these Codes have no status or force of law, they are merely 'good intentions'. In the European Union and the USA, the law prohibits creation of monopolies, and many companies have introduced internal 'walls' that must guarantee no prescience of changing stock values.

In India, the Report of SEBI committee (India) on Corporate Governance defines corporate governance as the acceptance by management of the inalienable rights of shareholders as the true owners of the corporation and of their own role as trustees on behalf of the shareholders. It is about commitment to values, about ethical business conduct and about making a distinction between personal & corporate funds in the management of a company." The definition is drawn from the Gandhian principle of trusteeship and the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. Corporate Governance is viewed as business ethics and a moral duty. (Source: Wikipedia)

Confucius & morals

Morals are solutions to ethical questions, in the form of behavioural guidelines. These may serve well for a particular time and place, but they may lose their quality as a solution over time. Many culturally determined morals in Eastern Asia have been developed 2,5 millennia ago by the Chinese philosopher Master Kong, better known to the world as Confucius (551-479 BC; see also att. 1). However, his solutions – applications of ethics – were redirected at solving problems in his day and age. In our age, some of his solutions create problems. As we have seen when discussing Power Distance, his ideas about authority in family, school and organizations could very well be a root cause of serious inhibitions in communication between parents and children, teachers and students, employers and employees. However,

Confucius places great emphasis on the responsibility of those in power, to be an ethical example. Not just in their words, but in their actions. So the elderly must show the young how to behave ethically by living an ethical life. And that wisdom appears to be a universal truth.

To change the ethical mindset of the South East Asian peoples, and given their Confucianist roots, the best solution would be to start developing ethics awareness at the very top of governments and organizations: those in power should take a fresh look at unethical practices, such as corruption and neglect of environmental issues in their countries, and become living and visible examples of incorruptible, ethical behavior. Their role model is Singapore, where strong ethical leadership has resulted in a no. 1 position on the world list of corruption, with 'no. 1' being the least corrupt.

Currently, we are witnessing changes: the governments of several South East Asian countries are in the process of not only becoming aware, but also adding action to words. We see examples in Vietnam, such as the Vinashin case, and more and more acts to fight pollution and environmental neglect. The fact that South East Asian countries are aware that they too are 'districts' of our global village called Earth, and that "the whole world is watching", plays a significant role in this process. During the 20th century we have witnessed the development of global social control, with the United Nations and other worldwide organizations increasingly functioning as platforms where unethical practices are being discussed.

Prime Minister acknowledges government missteps in Vinashin debacle

"Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung has acknowledged the government's role and his responsibility in Vietnam's grave fiscal woes.

"As head of the government, I would like to take responsibility for the government's limits and weaknesses," he said during a National Assembly session broadcast live on Wednesday (November 24). "The government and the Prime Minister are aware of their responsibilities in fulfilling their tasks as instructed by the Politburo and carrying out a successful plan to restructure Vinashin and avoid similar problems in the future."

Thanh Niên Weekly (November 26 – December 2, 2010)

No corruption inside

"Leaders must be transparent in their drive for clean business. Let them put a slogan on the entrance: "No Corruption Inside". Business partners must be invited to address attempts at corruption by filling in a 'stop corruption'-card (name & shame). Any alleged case must be investigated demanding full view of the pre-job possessions and current possessions. Proven corruptible = loss of position. The [management] can promote this by rewarding contracts only to companies which comply with the ethical requirements."

P. Brok (The Netherlands)

Ostracization

"As we are more interconnected, the world becomes more and more like the local village - you can't be a bad-arse in a small village, cause everyone knows what you're up to. I was brought up in a small town, and if you stuff up, they know about it and you are usually kicked out, one way or the other. Companies risk that same ostracization if they behave unethically in a world that now really has become a small, transparent community."

(source unknown)

4.2 Ethical Decision Skills

To make people aware of the need for ethics, one needs to start at the top. When leaders are unethical, or tolerate unethical practices, citizens as a collective will accept lack of ethics as 'normal'. Ethics education in countries with a large Power Distance can only be successful if their leaders themselves are ethical. I believe that their example has a deeper impact than the behaviour of leaders of countries with a relatively short Power Distance.

To educate (or re-educate) people the best way, in my opinion, would be to integrate ethics in the complete curriculum, from elementary school to university, and beyond: both governmental, non-governmental, commercial, NGO's and charity organizations.

The method to be employed would consist of cases, prepared to fit each educational level. Each case should describe a situation where a decision or choice must be made. These are to be discussed in class or office. The leader / teacher / manager / parent should lead the discussion, and make clear what the ethical decision (or choice) is.

Leaders, Teachers, Managers and Parents must be living examples of a conscious choice for ethical behavior.

The success of Singapore is evidence that setting an ethical example is not limited to a single person who exemplifies ethical behaviour. The Singapore system – whatever one may think of it – has created a society where corruption is intolerable, and therefore minimal. At least, this is the country's image, and it works in bringing business to Singapore. Singaporeans I have met tell me that they accept the authority of their government as long as the government leaders and officials behave in an ethical way: if what they do is beneficial for the Singaporeans, Singapore, its worldwide reputation and its nature. Of course one may agree or disagree about some aspects, such as the criminal defamation law, and the death penalty. Apparently, these issues do not affect the image of Singapore as a 'minimal corruption' country. But this is not the place and time to discuss these issues.

Conclusions

In South East Asian countries with a strong Confucianism-influenced culture, this has an even deeper impact than in countries where the distance in power is much less. This is strengthened by the deeply embedded cultural and sociological phenomenon of 'losing face'. Developing Ethics Awareness is not a simple, short-term activity. It takes time, and above all, it takes strong ethical leadership. With people in power positions – government, corporations – who are aware of the fact that their ethical behaviour not only provides the best opportunities and a clean reputation for their country, but also, THE example for their citizens and employees to follow.

Ethics is a personal decision to act, or not to act. You may want to, but cannot effectively put it into a 'code', into a political or law system, or religion. In the end it's the example of an individual that is recognized as ethical or unethical.

The good thing is, there is hope for restoration of ethics awareness and ethical decision making. The sad thing is, it will take time.

Recommendations

1. Promote in whatever way possible, ethics awareness among leaders of organizations and representatives of the Law.
2. Develop ethics awareness programs for all educational levels, to develop ethical decision skills.
3. Study the Singapore 'system' to see what elements may be adopted fast.
4. Respect tradition and culture, unless used as justification for unethical practices.
5. Don't maintain low salaries for officials expecting they will compensate their monthly deficit by accepting bribes.
6. Condemn and end corruption, and develop a program to handle the consequences of ending it.
7. Lead ethical lives and be an ethical example to the young.
8. When on the road to Power, realize that "power corrupts" (see att. 3)
9. Allow people to make mistakes while developing ethics awareness. But, make sure they learn from their mistakes – not by punishing them, but by educating them.

December 2010, Amsterdam / Ho Chi Minh City

Loek Hopstaken

Attachments

1. Confucianism; Confucius and Ethics
2. Losing Face; Collectivism vs. Individualism
3. Stop your Power Trip before it starts

1. Confucianism

Confucianism is a system of behaviors and ethics that stress the obligations of people towards one another based upon their relationship. The basic tenets are based upon five different relationships:

- Ruler and subject
- Husband and wife
- Parents and children
- Brothers and sisters
- Friend and friend

Confucianism stresses duty, sincerity, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority. Through maintaining harmonious relations as individuals, society itself becomes stable.

Source: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/china-country-profile.html>

Confucius and Ethics

The Confucian theory of ethics as exemplified in *Lǐ* (禮) is based on three important conceptual aspects of life:

1. ceremonies associated with sacrifice to ancestors and deities of various types,
2. social and political institutions, and
3. the etiquette of daily behavior.

It was believed by some that *lǐ* originated from the heavens. Confucius's view was more nuanced. His approach stressed the development of *lǐ* through the actions of sage leaders in human history, with less emphasis on its connection with heaven. His discussions of *lǐ* seem to redefine the term to refer to all actions committed by a person to build the ideal society, rather than those simply conforming with canonical standards of ceremony. In the early Confucian tradition, *lǐ*, though still linked to traditional forms of action, came to point towards the balance between maintaining these norms so as to perpetuate an ethical social fabric, and violating them in order to accomplish ethical good. These concepts are about doing the proper thing at the proper time, and are connected to the belief that training in the *lǐ* that past sages have devised cultivates in people virtues that include ethical judgment about when *lǐ* must be adapted in light of situational contexts.

In early Confucianism, *yì* (義) and *lǐ* are closely linked terms. *Yì* can be translated as righteousness, though it may simply mean what is ethically best to do in a certain context. The term contrasts with action done out of self-interest. While pursuing one's own self-interest is not necessarily bad, one would be a better, more righteous person if one based one's life upon following a path designed to enhance the greater good, an outcome of *yì*. This is doing the right thing for the right reason. *Yì* is based upon reciprocity.

Just as action according to *lǐ* should be adapted to conform to the aspiration of adhering to *yì*, so *yì* is linked to the core value of *rén* (仁). *Rén* is the virtue of perfectly fulfilling one's responsibilities toward others, most often translated as 'benevolence' or 'humaneness'; translator Arthur Waley calls it 'Goodness' (with a capital G), and other translations that have been put forth include 'authoritativeness' and 'selflessness.' Confucius's moral system was based upon

empathy and understanding others, rather than divinely ordained rules. To develop one's spontaneous responses of *rén* so that these could guide action intuitively was even better than living by the rules of *yì*. To cultivate one's attentiveness to *rén* one used another Confucian version of the Golden Rule: one must always treat others just as one would want others to treat oneself. Virtue, in this Confucian view, is based upon harmony with other people, produced through this type of ethical practice by a growing identification of the interests of self and other.

In this regard, Confucius articulated an early version of the Golden Rule:

- “What one does not wish for oneself, one ought not to do to anyone else; what one recognises as desirable for oneself, one ought to be willing to grant to others.”(*Confucius and Confucianism*, Richard Wilhelm)

Confucius' political thought is based upon his ethical thought. He argues that the best government is one that rules through 'rites' (*li*) and people's natural morality, rather than by using bribery and coercion. He explained that this is one of the most important analects: 1. 'If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of the shame, and moreover will become good.' (Translated by James Legge) in the Great Learning (大學). This 'sense of shame' is an internalisation of duty, where the punishment precedes the evil action, instead of following it in the form of laws as in Legalism.

While he supported the idea of government by an all-powerful sage, ruling as an Emperor, probably because of the chaotic state of China at his time, his ideas contained a number of elements to limit the power of rulers. He argued for according language with truth; thus honesty was of paramount importance. Even in facial expression, truth must always be represented. In discussing the relationship between a king and his subject (or a father and his son), he underlined the need to give due respect to superiors. This demanded that the inferior must give advice to his superior if the superior was considered to be taking the wrong course of action. This was built upon a century after Confucius's death by his latter day disciple Mencius, who argued that if the king was not acting like a king, he would lose the Mandate of Heaven and be overthrown. Therefore, tyrannicide is justified because a tyrant is more a thief than a king. Other Confucian texts, though celebrating absolute rule by ethical sages, recognise the failings of real rulers in maxims such as, “An oppressive government is more feared than a tiger.”

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius>

2. Losing Face

The concept of 'face' roughly translates as 'honour', 'good reputation' or 'respect'. There are four types of 'face':

- 1) *Diu-mian-zi*: this is when one's actions or deeds have been exposed to people.
- 2) *Gei-mian-zi*: involves the giving of face to others through showing respect.
- 3) *Liu-mian-zi*: this is developed by avoiding mistakes and showing wisdom in action.
- 4) *Jiang-mian-zi*: this is when face is increased through others, i.e. someone complementing you to an associate.

It is critical you avoid losing face or causing the loss of face at all times.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

In general, the Chinese are a collective society with a need for group affiliation, whether to their family, school, work group, or country.

In order to maintain a sense of harmony, they will act with decorum at all times and will not do anything to cause someone else public embarrassment.

They are willing to subjugate their own feelings for the good of the group.

This is often observed by the use of silence in very structured meetings. If someone disagrees with what another person says, rather than disagree publicly, the person will remain quiet. This gives face to the other person, while speaking up would make both parties lose face.

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/china-country-profile.html>

3. Stop Your Power Trip Before It Starts

Everything in moderation. My late father, a physician, always emphasized that to his patients. While Dad was focusing more on what people ate or drank, he could easily have been talking about how people behave.

I was reminded of Dad's advice when I read Jonah Lehrer's fine essay in the Wall Street Journal discussing the "paradox of power," a syndrome that turns people in authority into dictators. Lehrer quotes Dr. Dacher Keltner, a psychologist at the University of California, who says, "When you give people power, they basically start acting like fools."

Executives who engage in abusive or coercive behavior of their subordinates may be showing that Lord Acton's statement — "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" — is not just a maxim, but reality. Leaders can get into trouble by subconsciously thinking it they have no limits on their power, even though they'd never say such a thing out loud. Such thinking is all too often reinforced by direct reports who subordinate themselves in order to curry favor with their bosses.

So what is a well-intentioned leader to do? My advice is to regularly reflect on these three questions.

What good can I do with my power? The 17th century Jesuit philosopher Baltasar Gracian wrote: "The sole advantage of power is that you can do more good." Executives can apply that adage to running the business wisely. As Lehrer notes in his essay, power can free executives to push the organization to innovate. It can also stimulate the leader to look over the horizon to envision new possibilities and act on such possibilities if it will help the business grow and prosper.

What harm can I cause with my power? Executives kid themselves if they avoid thinking of the dark side of power. It is real — and it is easy to employ. Just look at the number of executives who fell from power when they crossed the line by thinking themselves above scrutiny in matters of business etiquette, fiscal prudence or even sexual appropriateness. Face the topic, and think of how power can corrupt yourself and hurt others.

What can I do to stay humble? Leaders need to surround themselves with smart people who are not afraid to assert themselves even — or maybe especially — when it goes contrary to the leader's ideas. Executives fall into traps by relying on the same people for advice, and too often habits form that whatever the boss says goes. That is not what the leader deserves; he or she needs to be challenged.

"Power," wrote Woodrow Wilson, "consists in one's capacity to link his will with the purpose of others, to lead by reason and a gift of cooperation." To do so takes discipline and self-reflection. The questions above are a place to start, and should stimulate soul searching.

How do you keep yourself honest about how you wield power?

John Baldoni is a leadership consultant, coach, and speaker. He is the author of nine books, including 12 Steps to Power Presence: How to Assert Your Authority to Lead. See his archived blog for Harvard Business Review (www.hbr.org).

