Chapter 11
Giving Voice to Values:
A New Perspective on Ethics in Globalised Organisational Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a multilevel approach to the practical expression of core values and ethical commitments in a globalised world. GVV is an innovative approach to business ethics that offers a way of implementing and expressing ethical values at the micro, meso, and macro levels of social interaction. In this chapter we describe the GVV approach and show how it can be applied both theoretically and practically to the task of expressing our shared values from the personal all the way to the global level of ethical concerns.

INTRODUCTION: EXPRESSING VALUES IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

"Global issues can only be understood as issues of increasingly broadening our understanding of the local, our understanding of who are the neighbors with whom we must productively and amicably engage" (Schrader, 2009, p. 22).

One of the distinguishing features of contemporary life is the increasing interdependence between the personal, the local and the global. We see this in the links between the local workplace and international economies, in individual consumer choice and its impact on the global environment, and the links between personal ethics and the capacity of our planet to provide sustainable and sustaining natural and social environments. We live in interdependent and interconnected worlds and, as never before, the expression of our values

and ethical commitments will play a central role in shaping the social and natural environments that sustain us.

A useful way of considering organisational ethics is to regard it as a constellation of ongoing conversations and negotiations about our values and their implementation in our workplaces. Ethics underpins both personal and collective human action, the goals that we aim for and the circumstances we aspire to. With the increasing globalisation of organisational relationships and their impact on natural and social environments, there is a need to develop more sophisticated conversations about how our values can be expressed from the personal all the way up to the global level of doing business (Collier & Fuller, 2004). This web of relationships is a multilevel phenomenon in that values find expression in our intrapersonal life, our interpersonal relationships, organisational work, community involvements, political and economic life and in the global network of associations and influences that each of us contributes to. How then can we connect the practical expression of our ethical commitments with this multilevel web of work and organisational involvements? How can we situate the "how" of building values-based working lives within the "how" of building sustaining organisations and global economies?

In this chapter we describe a new approach to the implementation and teaching of ethical values called "Giving Voice to Values" (GVV) (Gentile, 2008; Gentile, 2010a). GVV concentrates on how we can take action and communicate our core ethical commitments when they are challenged or when the innovative possibilities of ethical motivations are not being recognised. In the following pages we describe the relevance of GVV to the many different organisational realities that constitute globalised working environments. One of the many benefits of GVV in this multi-level context is that it does not create an either-or dichotomy between the "bad apple" and the "bad barrel" versions of addressing ethical issues

(Ashforth, Gioia, Robinson & Trevino, 2008). The "bad apple" approach places causal emphasis on the ethical character of individuals and on their personal decision-making capacities and psychological characteristics. The "bad barrel" approach takes a structural view of unethical behaviour. Theories based on this perspective focus on those organisational and regulatory environments that result in systemic corruption and other widespread unethical practices. GVV, in contrast to both these theoretical orientations, places its explanatory spotlight on how deeply held convictions and ethical values are either suppressed or expressed. The unit of analysis is the conversation rather than the single individual or the social collective. Conversation and communications are the locations for performing ethical analysis and for learning to articulate ethical concerns and commitments. Consequently, GVV is eminently suited to exploring multi-level environments because it explores interactions that occur (or not) across and between any strata in a multilevel system rather than assuming that one particular level is causal.

The expression of core values by individuals, groups and organisations are powerful acts that have an impact far beyond their immediate context. The GVV lens sees that impact unfolding at multiple levels within many contexts including the micro world of intra- and interpersonal debates all the way up to the activities of international organisations and global networks and systems. But more than this, because of its dialogical focus, GVV can investigate the practical relationships between the personal, the organisational and the global. Even where values are expressed in policy documents, vision and mission statements or as global agreements, these commitments are always voiced and implemented through personal and interpersonal involvements. This perspective links the personal voice with the ethical dialogues performed within communities of all kinds.

Before introducing the GVV approach in more detail, a brief discussion of the literature on globalisation and ethics will be presented.

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