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VALUES BASED MANAGEMENT WORKPLACE

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Abstract:

The authors are convinced of the necessity in a human dimension in managerial decision making.

The problem is to define values in a human context. We have suggested a framework for understanding the origins and scope of human values. We trace values to theistic, humanistic and empirical origins, and connect these to individual, sociological and ecological levels of application. We have illustrated our framework with a case study of a systematic approach to teach human values to managers in India. While this approach is mainly using a theistic approach, we recommend that other approaches to values can be included in courses teaching human values to managers.

INTRODUCTION

Human values are necessary in today's management. Business is no longer confined to a national state but is really borderless. Hence business from the international viewpoint cannot be regulated by governments unless international agreements can be reached. In this "lawless land" the responsibility of the executive is greater than ever. Which values does s/he promote in her/his actions and decisions? Which responsibility does s/he take? Only towards the bottom line or also towards the growth of mankind?

On a national level we find similar concerns with ethics and values in management. Being a generator and facilitator of human material wealth, does her/his responsibility towards human values end there?

We do believe that the manager of today has a wider responsibility than that. We believe that it is in the interest of the managers themselves to have a heightened awareness of the values of humankind and also to promote them.

Human values: what are they?

Like most basic areas of human knowledge and experience, the concept of human values defies definitions. Yet it can be instinctively felt, cognitively grasped, discussed as a shareable experience, and thus made a valid area of enquiry. This enquiry is a major under-current of the wisdom literature of all the ancient civilizations and of the later day philosophers, scholars and great leaders of social and political movements. The profusion of ideas, divergent approaches and intermixing of several strands of thought make the effort of conceptualizing human values a daunting task for modern scholarship. However, for a clearer understanding of the scope, significance and interrelationship of these ideas it is necessary to have a conceptual framework for classifying them. In the following paragraphs we make a humble attempt at this difficult academic endeavour.

Classical literature does not make a distinction between values and human values. Perhaps there

was no need for it then. Philosophical ideas on value enquiry were directed towards finding the nature, meaning and purpose of human existence. In the present century search for a theory of values has become a separate branch of modern philosophy and has been called axiology. Although the different realms of this value enquiry cover all areas of human concern like ethics, religion, art, science, social science, law etc., no separate or special significance is attached to the term human values.

One main approach to this classical value enquiry we would like to call the ideal-normative approach.

In the Western tradition it is represented by Plato's formulation of the absolute values of Truth, goodness and Beauty. They are conceived as having independent existence of their own and are used as ideal norms for value judgment at the relative level of human existence. In the Indian tradition absolute values are related to the absolute reality whose nature is described as Sat, Chit and Anand. Attainment of a state of eternal bliss by the realization of identity of the individual self with the universal Self of this absolute reality is the highest and ultimate object of human striving.

Closely related to this absolutist perception is the theistic view which may be called a sub-group of the idealistic-normative approach. It is based on a metaphysical belief system which accepts the reality of a divine cosmic order and faith in the authority of a creator God who is also the upholder of all values.

The basis of all ethical, social and other human values is sought in the enduring truths, either revealed or obtained through super conscious insights of sages, contained in the sacred religious literature.

Although differing in their belief systems, rituals and customs, the great world religions have a large area of agreement on the basic moral values, conceptions of personal virtues and social group behaviour based on humanistic values of love, brotherhood, caring and sharing. Many leaders of the Indian renaissance, e.g. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, were inspired by the absolutist-theistic value system and used it as the basis for their efforts towards the spiritual, social and political rejuvenation of the Indian society.

In recent times the term 'human values' has been used for this theistic approach to value system. This is perhaps because of the need to highlight the universal humanistic aspects of this value approach, as against the merely speculative, mystical, or life-denying ascetic aspects. In the modern interpretation of theistic value approach the authors have shown its relevance and significance to the managers and other professionals. Another reason for the use of adjective 'human' before these values may be to distinguish this value approach from the modern, so-called scientific, approach to human phenomena and associated values.

Interpreted in its narrow sense this scientific approach robs man of the dignity of his divine association, his spiritual nature and reduces him to a biological organism of a random collection of atoms. It denies any meaning and purpose to life and rejects all considerations of faith, belief, feeling and intuitive religious perceptions. This mechanistic, deterministic interpretation makes man merely a malleable automaton, to be 'programmed' to meet the demands of the existing socio-technological order, through manipulation of his lower order needs and desires.

In the second sub-group of the idealistic-normative approach to human values we would like to place all the different strands of humanistic thoughts, ranging from love and compassion of Buddha to the radical humanism of Marx. Included in this sub-group are the ideas of humanists having varying degrees of theistic, non-theistic and atheistic leanings but attaching prime importance to man and to human values. As Fromm (1981, p. 148) points out "There is a remarkable kinship in the ideas of the Buddha, Eckhart, Marx, and Schweitzer: their radical demand for giving up the having orientation; their insistence on complete independence; their metaphysical skepticism; their godless religiosity, and their demand for social activity in the spirit of care and human solidarity" social or technological orders at their day. They developed a new ethics of man based on interconnectedness of humankind, love and respect for life, the joy of sharing and caring, and the faith in man to shape his own destiny. They find deep reflections in the literary traditions of both the East and the West over the last few centuries and gave rise to different kinds of social and political theories, like liberalism and socialism, for the betterment of humankind, particularly of the oppressed and the exploited. In recent times it has led to the declaration of Universal Human Rights by the United Nations. The term human value has generally been understood in this context of humanistic thoughts. Values are "responses to three universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope: needs of individual biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction and requirements for smooth functioning and survival of groups". This approach is non-normative and is not based on any religious, philosophical system of ideas or world view, or on any social-political ideology. Identification of values, their classification, and search for interrelationships between them is based on empirical methods of observation, attitude surveys, statistical validation techniques etc. Conceptualization of human values based on the findings of empirical research is fast becoming a distinct area of social science research.

These empirical studies and researches on human values are not merely idealistic or intellectual

exercises. They are purposive in the sense that the knowledge gained by them is sought to be utilized for practical purposes in diverse areas like, management science leadership and team building, human resource development etc.), socio-political policy

Another way of classifying the different approaches to human values could be in terms of the level of aggregation they focus their attention on. These levels may be called the individual, the sociological and the ecological. The first level focuses on the individual human being, taken as an independent entity. Some illustrative value terms referring to this level are survival values, character, personal virtues, aesthetic appreciation, human rights, salvation, self-realization, etc.

At the second level individual values are subordinated to the sociological values. It is concerned with operation of values at the collective level of human society and includes values associated with family and other social institutions and professions; caring and sharing, sense of social responsibility, social and economic justice, sarvodaya, values of humanity and human interconnectedness, etc. Similarly the ecological level subordinates the first two and consists of values from the standpoint of human beings as a part of the total ecological system. In the reports commissioned by the Club of Rome there is a concern for developing a "new world consciousness..., a new ethic in the use of material resources, a new attitude towards nature, based on harmony rather than on conquest ... a sense of identification with future generations" to avoid global catastrophe caused by unrestrained economic growth. "For the first time a demand is being made for an ethical change, not as a consequence of ethical belief but as the rational consequence of economic analysis". Human values perceptions from this perspective focus on the interdependency of human beings and nature and include expressive terms like respect for and harmony with nature, concept of Mother Earth, sustainability, conservation etc.

We thus arrive at a two-dimensional matrix for the classification of human values concepts. One dimension of this matrix consists of the different approaches and the other of the three levels of aggregation, shown as the horizontal and the vertical columns of the table below.

It needs to be emphasised that the categories in this proposed classification scheme are far from being exclusive. In fact they very much overlap. For example many of the humanistic approaches have theistic foundations and many items of the empirical approach are reformulations of the idealistic approach. What is being implied in the classification is the identification of the main emphasis or main focus of the approach. The entries in the matrix indicate what we consider to be the main level(s) of aggregation which a particular approach focuses on. In our view the theistic approach focuses mainly on the individual level in its quest for making a "good" man, whereas the humanistic approach is concerned with both the "good" man and the "good" society. This is not to deny the sociological and ecological concerns of the theistic approach; however we feel that these concerns are secondary to that for the individual. On the other hand the different empirical approaches together cover all the three, individual, social and ecological levels.

The progression in the above matrix, both in the vertical and the horizontal directions, has a chronological order. The earliest human value perceptions were related to the individual level. The growing complexities and tensions of the human societies enlarged the scope to include the sociological considerations as its second focus. And the disastrous impact of the rapid technological developments, coupled with the population explosion, of the present century has made ecological concern as the third focus. Once again this chronological flow has no exclusivity.

The philosophical speculations and beliefs of the earliest civilisations, including the aboriginal civilisations in existence today, have remarkable sensitivity and insights about the nature and man's relation to it. However it is only in the recent times that the theme has acquired an urgency to prompt development of a concerted approach to human values in relation to ecology. Similarly many of the later day humanistic values have been traced to the earliest Upanishadic idealistic-theistic views on life and its value. Yet there is a general chronological flow from the absolutist, theistic view of human values to the humanist view and finally to the present day empirical view.

Can human values be taught?

The question of interest to us is if human values can be taught to modern managers in any systematic way and, if so, to what effectiveness. Management Centre for Human Values,

Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, has since 1983 been giving workshops on the theme "Human Values" on an in-house basis in many companies and as open workshops for managers from different companies and academics, mainly from India, but also from abroad. The impetus for this development is said to have come from managers at various management development programmes given at Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta, asking for Indian insights that could be valuable for organizations and management.

The objective of the workshops is to enhance in course participants the sensitivity to and sustenance of the value-system, which has distilled from what he calls "the Indian ethos", based on studies of Buddhist, Vedantic and Yogic literature together with Indian epics and Pauranic literature. It is claimed that Indian values are found in the deep-structure of the Indian psyche, as reflected in these sources. The basic idea is purification of the mind, partly through a mind-stilling technique, and partly through practice of nourishing noble thoughts (e.g. compassion, friendliness, humbleness), and rejecting wicked ones (e.g. greed, jealousy, arrogance). Such practice will reveal the "divine", or "higher self", within the individual and she/he will be able to perceive the same in others. The goal is that in a management setting these practices will have repercussions on business life, more specifically in respect of the individual, improved cooperation, non-attachment to the selfish rewards of the work, increased creativity, service to the customer, improved quality, creating an ethico-moral soundness, cultivating self-discipline and self-restraint, and enhancing generosity.

The content of the workshops varies according to the duration. There are three modules, the first one lasting three days and the next two lasting two days each. Each module elaborates on different principles. Module I, also called the "foundational module", develops the basic concepts and practices. It is argued that managerial effectiveness is dependent on a sound values system, undergirding the superstructure of skills, which in turn emanates from a pure mind.

The factors influencing a pure mind are discussed in terms of higher and lower self, misidentification and re-identification with the latter and the former respectively, the guna, karma, samskaras, nishkam karma and other theories. The first steps of the mind-stilling technique relating to these principles are given at this stage. Module II focuses on leadership and teamwork and elaborates on a number of principles from the Vedantic and Buddhist literature connected to the theme. Additional steps in the mind-stilling technique are also introduced. Module III covers the topics stress, counseling and communication.

The main issue here is to identify with one's innermost self, which is ananda, as the basic remedy for stress-generating influences. A few more steps are included in the mind-stilling process in this module. These modules can be taken separately or jointly. In the annual workshop at the Management Centre for Human Values all three modules are offered integrally.

The workshops are promoted directly and indirectly: directly through mailing of pamphlets to selected companies, and indirectly through the network of previous course participants on the workshops.

Initiatives to the in-house workshops can come from top management, HRD (personnel) department, open workshop participants who want to bring in the workshop to the company, persons who have come in contact with Chakraborty's ideas, etc. The participation in the workshops are mostly on a voluntary basis, whereas there could be occasions when managers have been asked by the CEO or someone high up to attend the workshops.

Following our categorization of human values above, these workshops would fall into the "ideal normative" approach, with theistic leanings. The source of the values taught at the workshops is derived from the sacred texts of Indian wisdom literature, and the values are claimed to have an eternal and universal character to a great extent. It is normative in the sense that the values are something people ought to have from the ideal perspective, not accepting certain values, or disvalues, just because people are having them. The basic foundation of values is taken to be divine, implying a theistic approach, whereas the humanistic elements are found in caring values, concern for others, love and compassion. The level of focus is mainly on the individual in terms of personal virtues. It is stated that in order to change the environment we must start with ourselves. Thus, more aggregated human levels (organizational, political, societal, ecological, and global) are not neglected, but the starting point is the individual.

1. We can only make inferences from the immediate time at the end of the workshop;
2. We can only study the managers' responses to, and expectations of human values, not how they are reflected in their behaviour;
3. We do not know whether there have occurred any changes in the managers' attitudes towards human values, as we don't have data from them prior to the workshop;
4. We do not know how honest their attitudes are due to perceived group pressure from peers, super/subordinates, from the course leader, desire to give a good (or bad) impression or other possible factors.
5. The answers are given spontaneously without forewarning and therefore may not be well thought out ideas.

CONCLUSION

Innovative approach to value education for practicing managers is impressive. He has culled out selected psycho-spiritual values from the traditional wisdom literature of India, suitably reinterpreted them and woven them together to form a coherent theory of human values. This theory is then utilised to explain the problems and tensions of both personal and work life of modern professionals and to indicate the way for a better quality of life. That this approach finds deep resonance in the hearts and minds of Indian managers is evident from our observations of the course participants' enthusiastic, and at times deeply moving, articulations at the conclusion of the workshops.



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