Public Organiz Rev (2012) 12:243–249
DOI 10.1007/s11115-012-0187-6

Developing a Multicultural Organizational Code of Ethics Rooted in the Moral Obligations of Citizenry

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Published online: 3 August 2012
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Abstract The increasing globalization of business and boundary-spanning government alliances has created a clash of values that can prevent effective working relationships. Given that each country wants to be considered an equal partner, this clash can strike at the core of effective communication. Various solutions posed to date have been unable to resolve this impediment. This treatise suggests a framework for establishing a shared set of values across cultures by focusing not on the ethics of business, but instead on the ethics of citizenship. A set of socio-ethical tenets is proposed as the basis for developing organizational ethics across cultures.

Keywords Organizational ethics · Multi-culturalism · Citizenry · Ethical codes

Different cultures operate on differing ethical values (Schein 1992) and that has led to difficulty in engaging in cross-cultural business and government enterprises (Ardichvili et al. 2012; 2009). These ethical clashes have become more pronounced as globalization increases and the creating of nation partnerships grows. There is widespread agreement that shared values are essential to basic business interactions (e.g., Ralston 2008). A fundamental issue in global business and governmental relations is, when ethical conduct conflicts, which country's values should prevail (Michaelson 2010; Stajkovic and Luthans 1997)? As national boundaries have no moral significance and do not in themselves delineate the scope of social obligations (Beitz 1979), the need for international norms of ethical behavior are accentuated (Windsor 2004; Svensson et al. 2009; Amstutz 1999).

There is evidence that all sectors are moving toward a common code of ethical behavior in order to facilitate effective relations. Examples of such initiatives are the Social Accountability 8000, which focuses primarily on

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working conditions and workers' rights; Accountability 1000, primarily focused on social accountability and inclusivity of stakeholder needs; and the Global Reporting Initiative, which focuses on sustainability and stakeholder dialog (Beschorner and Muller 2007).

Business ethicists are reluctant to assert that one way of doing business is superior to another (e.g., Michaelson 2010; Svensson et al. 2009). Thus, there is movement in all sectors toward a code of ethical behavior that promotes the good of societies in general (Beschorner and Muller 2007). Many businesses have voluntarily begun shifting their ethical codes to align with good governance codes in order to positively impact business development (Friedman 2005). To broaden that initiative, the call by some researchers is to overcome the divisiveness of business ethics by instituting codes rooted in the obligations of citizenry (Choi and Digol 2010; Lyles et al. 2004). The assumption is that a common business language can emerge when a code transcends sectors and instead focuses on citizenry (Mujtaba et al. 2011), citizenry being a shared affiliation across all borders.

Rooting an ethical bond in citizenry recognizes that everyone is a member of a nation state regardless of mode of doing business. Not rooted in the divisive ideal of a free market or capitalism (Calkins and Werhane 1998), a code rooted in citizenry avoids moral absolutes, allows for flexibility and inclusiveness, and facilitates stakeholder responsibility and awareness, such as suggested by Campbell (2006). Further, the initiative emphasizes global citizenship (Schwab 2008) and corporate responsibility (Scherer and Palazzo 2007), and de-values annihilatory politics. Moral values can facilitate global allegiance, require impartiality, and could be self-enforcing (Amstutz 1999). Citizen codes should be reflexive and avoid stressing a fixed system of rules. Instead, they should emphasize ethical learning and development, and also proactively involve dialogs of responsibility among organizations, governments, and stakeholders (Beschorner and Muller 2007). Governments, organizations, and individuals need to be partners in this effort (Pearson and Seyfang 2001). Long-standing philosophical precepts provide the basis for a modern conceptualization of organizational ethics that supersedes multi-culturalism. The next step is to translate the precepts into actionable frameworks.

Ethical obligations of citizenry

What constitutes the perfect society and the ideal individual within that society? Plato contended in The Republic (2011) that the ethical nature of man, his free will, finds its legal rights only as a member of a nation or state. Society is the venue through which the expression of freewill by the individual is fully realized, and through this interaction the nation establishes the purpose of the individual's existence (Hegel 1870a) for it is only through the exercise of free will in relation to being a citizen of a nation that the individual attains the highest levels of humankind. In effect, the nation and the citizen form a partnership (Lewis 1939). Further, and as Rohr (1998) would concur, the constitution of the nation represents it's, as well as the individual's, consciousness. While the concept of the nation or state was comparatively quite limited during Plato's existence, the central notion of his work in linking the individual to his/her role in society has grown proportionate to the world's populace. What complicates

the issue of asserting Plato's cardinal values: wisdom, bravery, temperance, and justice in a common code of behavior is the need to transcend the multi-culturalism of today's world. Hegel recognized the increasing complication of society and the challenge of applying Plato's concepts to his own (2011, written in 1870). He concluded that the constitution represents a collective statement of the will of the people, and that applying the constitution is meant to actually manage the affairs of the nation according the circumstances of time and place (Hegel 1870b). Rohr (1998) echoes Hegel's acknowledgement of the increasingly complicative nature of modern society to the current period, wherein ethics is a form of constitutional practice. As citizenship is an integral element of a constitution, a constitution essentially gives citizenship a reason to exist, and building upon shared constitutional values offers a starting point for a behavioral code (Morse 1999). To develop this common code, to make "moral sense out of group interests," (Rohr 1998, p. 164), is the challenge in a globalized economy.

Plato (and Morse 1999) maintains it is the community's responsibility to educate its citizenry on the expected code of ethical behavior for the nation. Aristotle furthered this concept in calling for a dialectic as well as rhetoric and disputation (Hegel 1871). In modern times, these philosophical concepts have been translated into concrete standards (Mujtaba et al. 2011) with an increased focus on educating the public service about shared ethical standards. Part of this education is to articulate the separation of law from ethics and the notion that ethicality is preserved through the application of laws. As with Hegel (1870a), the goal is for the perpetuation of an ethical state, not the facilitation of subjective individuality.

A common precept in these works is the notion that being a citizen implies a common ethical obligation regardless of the nation with which one is linked. The implied agreement to be part of an organized system is an essential condition of social cooperation (Lewis 1939) despite the fact that different cultures operate on differing organizational ethical values (Ardichvili et al. 2012; Ardichvili et al. 2009). The consequence of globalization and nation partnerships is increasing alignment of values that should lead to effectively working together (Ralston 2008). The question is how to articulate this set of values (Cohen 1993).

The social contract as originally explicated by Plato (Lewis 1939) provides a basis for this conceptualization. As stipulated in the social contract, individuals forego the maximization of individual gain in order to contribute to the good of the whole and in return receive the benefits that accrue from membership in a society, such as protection, sociability, cultural development, educational resources, and familial identification (Ardrey 1974). The concept is commonly known as mutually transferring rights, e.g., I will give up my right to kill whomever I choose because you have also given up that right. Social contract arguments have as their foundation the belief that citizens explicitly or tacitly consent to forego some of their individual freedoms and accept the authority of the state or the will of the majority, in exchange for advocacy for the greater good and a guarantee of individual natural rights.

According to Hobbes (1660), life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" without political order, social values, and the law. In the absence of such commonly-shared systems, individuals would operate with unrestrained natural freedoms, including the right to murder, steal, rape, and torture. The result of such

unrestrained freedoms, Hobbes postulated, is a continual war pitting individual against individual with no social order and without the basis for achieving either individual or societal goals. In order to allow individuals to live together in peace and to achieve their individual goals, communities are established through a social contract wherein individuals agree to abide by a constitutional authority. The alternative to a social contract, Hobbes asserted, is a state of terrifying anarchy.

Beyond the social contract, humans have both physical and psychological needs to be a part of a shared-values group.

Intrinsic need for group affiliation

Psychologically, humans are driven by the concept of homophily, the conscious or unconscious desire to develop associative bonds with individuals who are similar to one another in values, interests, and goals (Christakis and Fowler 2009). Individuals within a social group exert influence over one another to varying degrees resulting in tighter bonds and a stronger influence of the community on the individual. People tend to identify personally with the overall accomplishments or offenses of the group as a whole. As a result, individuals link their self-esteem to the group's performance. This phenomenon is known as social identity theory (Hogg and Terry 2000; Ashforth and Mael 1989). These processes, among others, solidify a community's internalization of constitutional values, linking adherence to social rules to their own sense of self-esteem.

The field of social neuroscience has established a body of research linking biological systems to individual behavior. The basis for their inquiry is the supposition that neural and hormonal mechanisms in humans develop in concert with evolutionary-favored social behaviors. Over the past thirty-odd years, repeated studies have identified neurological bases for social contract theory wherein individuals forego personal gain for the good of the group. This propensity is reportedly biologically determined and absent only in those individuals who exhibit physiological brain impairments (Brune et al. 2003). Dawes et al. (2012) and Berns et al. (2005), among others, have identified the neurological processes that accompany self-sacrificing behavior in support of equality within groups and that cause group members to abide by the rule of the majority even if it conflicts with an individual's desires. Research by Zheng et al. (2010), Estevez et al. (2003), Pagel and Dawkins (1997), Tajfel (1981), and Brewer (1979) among many others, has contributed to a body of evidence linking biological processes to the conforming of one's personal goals to those of the group. Moll et al. (2005), again among others, has built upon this research to demonstrate that such behavior is spurred by neuronal activity and that this neuronal activity correlates with individual moral judgment. Collectively, these studies demonstrate support for the physiological basis of rooting a moral code in the citizenship behaviors of nation groups.

Lewis (1939) long ago asserted that shared values are essential to basic interactions and the purpose of the state is to enable citizens to help one another. This precept has been amplified in modern times, spurred by increasing globalization and the need for some standardized ethical code across cultures (Ralston 2008). The suggestion of many researchers, in acknowledging the failed efforts to impose one country's code of behavior upon another or one sector's professional code on another, has been to root a code in the notion of citizenry (Mujtaba 2011; Choi and Digol

2010; Lyles et al. 2004). There is increasing evidence that all sectors are moving toward a code of ethical behavior that promotes the good of society as a whole (Beschorner and Muller 2007) and organizations have voluntarily been shifting their business practices to align with good governance codes in order to positively impact global development (Friedman 2005).

A citizenship-based moral code

The literature to date offers guidance on what an effective moral code rooted in citizenship might entail. Beschorner and Muller (2007) aver that citizen codes should be reflexive, eschewing a fixed system of rules and instead emphasizing ethical education and advancement. Further, Pearson and Seyfang (2001) maintain that such a code should promote a dialogue of shared responsibility among organizations, governments, and stakeholders. Conclusively, moral values rooted in citizenship can facilitate global allegiance but require impartiality in their development and elements that are self-enforcing in order to motivate individuals and organizations to adhere to them (Amstutz 1999).

The evidence in support of the need for a global code combined with the knowledge that previous efforts that asserted one culture's viewpoint over another have failed and, in concordance with psychological and physiological evidence that individuals are predisposed to conform their behavior to moral codes based in the notion of citizenship, has brought us to the point where elements of such a code can now be debated. The set of ten socio-ethical tenets proposed below provide a possible starting point for this discussion. They are garnered from the shared canonical declarations of citizenship from countries across the globe. An effort was made to include those elements that pre-dominate in the constitutions, cultural profiles, and laws of our global communities.

10 possible starting points for a global moral code rooted in citizenship

- Respect and follow laws fairly imposed
- Educate oneself and give voice to issues of social importance
- Question government-sanctioned authority—who has it, how it is exercised; establish checks on power
- Respect diversity
- Support policies and programs that confer the greatest advantage to the greatest number
- Perform one's job well and pay fairly-imposed taxes
- Extend care and concern to those less fortunate
- Maintain property and possessions in good repair
- Support and facilitate the development of family members
- Protect environmental resources by consumption with concern for current and future generations

The common ethical denominators in these tenets are that they affirm respect for both the individual and their role in society. The also avoid categorical imperatives and allow for flexibility and dynamism in application. Finally, all have as a goal the advancement of health, productivity, and the safety of the citizenry through government and business processes in accordance with principles of citizenship.

In conclusion

The need for a global moral code is clear. Increasing globalization, enhanced diversity across the majority of cultures, and the proliferation of cross-sector enterprises has accentuated the negative consequences of a set of disparate moral codes on the conduct of business. A common language is needed and an interdisciplinary review of the literature suggests this language may best be rooted in the concept of citizenship as it applies to all individuals in all nations and as is rooted in our common psychological and physiological processes. As the call for such a code has grown louder and more articulate, it seems the clear next step is to begin the process of determining what such a code might entail. The ten socio-ethical tenets proposed here are intended as a starting point for that discussion.

Logical next steps are to build upon these tenets through conferences, publications, citizen meetings, and cross-sector conversations. The goal is to achieve a moral code to which all sectors and countries can legitimately refer for guiding governmental, NGO and business practices. It must not be rooted in one particular culture's beliefs or manipulated for political or monetary gain but instead should appeal to the desire of the individual, personally and professionally, to place the benefits of mutual enterprise and societal allegiance above self-interests. One looks forward to the discussions that may ensue.

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