

Returning to Kantian Principles: Fostering Respect by Embracing Tribal-Collectivism in Management Education

In business, respect is predicated on an assumption of worth. Educators often take a common sense approach when it comes to respect, assuming that adults will automatically confer value on others. This may be depicted by endorsing a stakeholder perspective, which, by definition, adopts a mantra of respect for all those connected to the firm's operations i.e., employees, suppliers, and customers alike. Despite its prevalence in business coursework (see Freeman et al., 2010), the stakeholder approach remains an exception rather than norm in many Western business operations. Thus, managers can find themselves in a crucible of hypocrisy, one where multiple values compete for supremacy. In such cases, a desire for corporate profits may usurp a desire to exercise respect. Given this context, combined with the exceptionally diverse nature of today's workplace population and customer base, it is essential that managers recognize and honor alternative views and learn how to demonstrate and cultivate respect within their organizations.

As disparaging global leadership and moral erosion are omnipresent in today's society, we observe a bonafide crisis of disrespect in business. The systemic nature of the problem is manifest in corporate unethical acts (e.g., Volkswagen), a lack of racial, ethnic, or religious sensitivity (e.g., H&M), and/or by ignoring pervasive and ongoing abusive behavior in daily operations (e.g., Uber), as well as industries being characterized by their insidious sexual harassment (e.g., entertainment.). As Blok (2017) suggests, corporate codes designed to ensure performance based upon responsible corporate behavior assert ethicality. But these codes do not necessarily assure moral action (Sekerka, 2016). Given this inadequacy, Blok argues that the corporate codes must be supplemented by formal (rules and procedures) and informal (customs and values) control systems that can boost the likelihood of ethical behavior. Corporate codes are viewed as a delicate balance between the organization's institutional design and the behavior of individual employees.

In preparing the next generation for management responsibility, we believe it is incumbent upon educators to underscore the value of respect (as a formal corporate code) and to provide learning opportunities that help demonstrate how to effectively embrace and exercise it (as an informal corporate code). To further this idea, we begin by revisiting the basic tenants of Kantian moral philosophy. We then offer a teaching tool, showing how ethical decision-making can be taught more broadly, advancing the typical individualistic stance to one that focuses on a tribal-collectivistic perspective.

Respect in the Workplace

Respect in the workplace has been defined in a variety of ways (see Grover, 2014 for a review). It may refer to being treated politely (Bies & Moag, 1986), how worthy and recognized one feels (De Cremer, 2002; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005), or cast as reputation within a group (Bartel et al., 2012), differentiated by feelings of inclusion (Ellmers et al., 2014). Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2010) define respectful leaders as maintaining an appreciative attitude toward others and acting on the basis of this attitude even if one does not like or agree with them. Some scholars regard respect as a series of judgments relating to the perceived worthiness, ethical behaviorism, and shared values that exist between leaders and followers (Clarke, 2011).

Regardless of the varying definitions, most discussions of respect reference some aspect of Kant's philosophy of ethics.

The *categorical imperative*, a core Kantian principle of morality, underscores that behavior must express respect for the worth of all individuals (1785/1996). Managers are thereby challenged by a fundamental moral obligation to respect people as an end in themselves, and not as a means to an end. Kant explains how each individual is owed respect solely because of their humanity, given their ability to be a moral agent (see *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018). To be a person, then, is to unequivocally deserve dignity. Every individual is due moral recognition, expressed in both attitude and conduct as a moral goal. Kant's philosophical platform asserts that respect is morally and unconditionally required, regardless of any stipulation, category, or circumstance. But based upon what a person observes, perceives, or experiences, one may or may not be inclined to respect others as they ought to be valued.

Managers are largely autonomous in their role to set and achieve goals; thus, they are imbued with the potential for moral agency. This power, via freedom of choice, gives them a prescribed duty to make value-driven choices. Managers can use their judgment to determine, apart from their instincts and desires, goals that are both valuable and important. The decision to value and demonstrate respect as a goal is a self-governed choice. Respect can be encouraged, but it is largely motivated internally. In understanding the purpose and meaning of one's life, an individual creates the conditions for shaping their commitment to personal moral responsibility, including the desire to offer respect. Kant explicated the requirements to which everyone is unconditionally subject, regardless of whatever inclinations, interests, goals, or duties they may have assigned to them. This view infuses a sort of equalizer among men and women, which thereby demands shared respect. Differences (in job description, status, or rank) have nothing to do with the prescribed requirement for the provision of respect.

Kant maintains that all rational beings attribute respect to themselves and that they must acknowledge that every other rational being has the same value. It is not because people are *homo sapiens* that we have this dignity, and thereby owed respect. But as rational beings capable of moral agency we deserve respect. If a person does not demonstrate respect for others, they may not value moral agency and may therefore be hindered in their ability to offer respect. A lack of internal self-respect and dignity for one's own capacity for moral agency, and/or not valuing morality, might explain a person's inability or lack of desire to show respect for others, thereby contributing to moral erosion and the current crisis of disrespect. As management educators, we must reaffirm the value of respect and provide ways in which it may be cultivated.

Despite various conceptions of what the term means, philosophical definitions typically include appreciation for the object of respect (Grover, 2014). Raz (2001) states that respect is associated with how people are treated, adding that "it is neither a feeling, nor an emotion, nor a belief, though it may be based on a belief and be accompanied (at least occasionally) by certain feelings" (p. 138). An affective element is likely present, given that treating people respectfully supports human dignity (Barilan, 2011; Rosen, 2012), which Hodson (2001) defines as an ability to establish a sense of self-worth, respect, and to appreciate others. The frequent use of the word appreciate (or appreciation) in association with the act of respect reinforces the need to value the act of respect as a moral goal. We worry that respect is too often assumed, rather than affirmed, cultivated, and reinforced in management education. Therefore, we considered how to bring this concern forward.

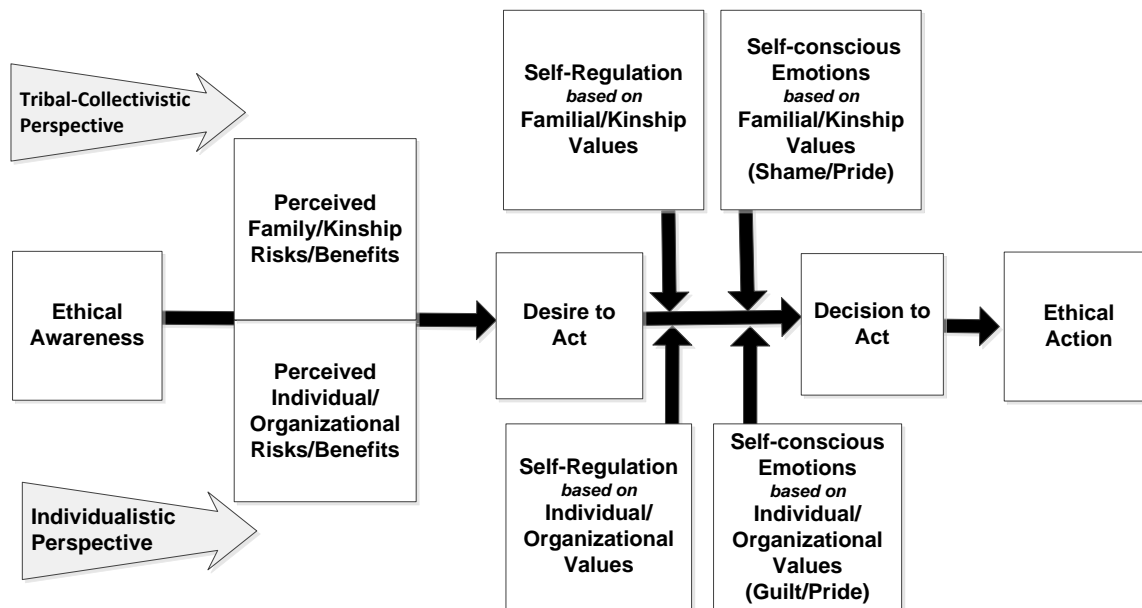
Given workplace disrespect is an ethical issue, we opted to leverage an ethical decision-making framework. Drawing upon work by Vandekerckhove (2010), we see building respect as

similar to building integrity in an organization, as it is an intersubjective process. He recasts organizational integrity as *talking the walk*; meaning it is socially constructed and established through progressive movement. Similarly, we view respect as being co-created through collaborative reflective discourse and shared meaning making.

Fostering Respect via Ethical Decision-making

When faced with ethical challenges, determining what is right can be influenced by the person, their situation, and the particular context (Treviño, 1986). People are often motivated to frame ethical issues relativistically, with a bias toward self-interest. Given that Western models are often used in management education, and are typically self-focused, we rarely see ethical decision-making models designed to foster empathy, or encourage the application of character strengths like self-regulation and other virtues that sponsor respect, like patience. Therefore, teaching managers how to navigate an ethical decision-making path that considers the views of others may not only be perceived as different and difficult, but some may deem it unworthy of their time. When the values of another culture appear to support practices that run counter to one’s own assumptions and expectations, other ethical issues may arise. This provides a rich platform for collaborative reflection, critical thinking, and discourse (see Figure 1). Given the potential for tension and volatility when people of different cultures, races, faiths, and national origins come together, we offer a unique platform to build respect in workplace settings.

Figure 1. An Ethical Decision-making Model with a Focus on Tribal-Collectivism¹



Use of an ethical decision-making model that offers multiple perspectives also addresses a very real and practical problem: an immediate need to understand and respect Middle

¹ Figure 1 reproduced with permission from *Journal of Business Ethics Education* (Marar Yacobian & Sekerka, 2014).

Eastern/Western coexistence. Given that transnational realities permeate workplace dynamics, yet few managers are versed in understanding alternative cultural perspectives. With the Middle East largely receiving negative media coverage (events describing terrorism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Arab Spring, ISIS, oil markets, and the Syrian migrant crisis), the consequential uneasiness and growing xenophobia continues to emerge in organizational settings. This unease has the potential to lend itself to Islamophobia, which can conceivably manifest in systemic Anti-Muslimism. Management education that fosters respect for others can have global significance, bearing in mind the degree to which immigration, migration and forced displacement have accelerated in recent years. With these changes, employees may begin to see themselves as being forced to tolerate and coexist with incoming “others.” This underscores the vast importance of creating awareness and respect within workplace settings, between the dominant group and outsiders trying to join, becoming a part of the group, and striving to contribute. Respect is vital in establishing and sustaining trust, which is essential for sustaining business relationships.

Returning to Kantian philosophy, the *categorical imperative* provides a convincing argument against ethical relativism (e.g., what one culture believes to be right or wrong, really is right or wrong for that culture). And yet, Kant’s principles suggest that ethics in business must be shared and co-created. As Bowie describes (2017), a certain minimum morality, or morality of the marketplace, can be universally adopted. This concept of international capitalism could be used to promote honesty and trust among different cultures participating in capitalist economic relations, potentially undermining certain forms of discrimination. To establish this shared understanding of morality, reflective discourse will have to be encouraged. In so doing, the social construction of formal and informal ethics codes could be collectively established. Use of frameworks that honor differences in route to demonstrating ethical behavior, while still affirming the need for moral action, could be leveraged to foster and affirm shared meaning through negotiated consensus.

Final Thoughts

The goal of this work is to help advance respect and openness toward working with others i.e., those who appear to be different and/or hold alternative perspectives from one’s own. By helping managers discover value similarities among perceived differences, educators can reduce misconceptions associated with external threats, which may not be consciously acknowledged. Elevating appreciation is useful in fostering respect, if management hopes to establish and maintain functional and ethical performance. This research bridges philosophy and practice, offering management educators a tool that can help edify the value and presence of respect in today’s multicultural workplace, at a time when predominant voices may be demonstrating disrespect as a means to accomplish their goals. Cross-cultural awareness and transparency in ethics means revealing and exploring alternatives ways of knowing. By honoring multiple vantage points, productive relationship-building, and an appreciation of others’ values, we can fortify ethics strength at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

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