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Is Moral Growth Possible for Managers? A Pragmatist Look at Managerial Ethics

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Keywords

John Dewey; Moral development; Moral growth; Moral habits; Pragmatism; Constructivism

Abstract

Every managerial choice is an opportunity to either grow or decline morally. Pragmatism, at least the Deweyan version presented here, maintains that there are no objective moral facts or values. Instead, our current moral outlook is the result of our past experiences and social interactions, and prone to evolve in the future. The function of morality in human lives is to make living together possible, but the morality that we inherit from our social surroundings is almost inescapably plagued by blind spots, biases, and narrowness. Like any other human being, the manager cannot choose their social background or inherited biases. What one can choose is to commit oneself to moral growth and a conscious attempt to expand one's moral outlook. Some of the key habits in this path are remaining open to other perspectives, consciously seeking opposing and novel voices, interpreting them charitably, and engaging in moral imagination. The resulting progress is not 'objective' growth, but moral growth – in the sense that, through such cultivation, one's moral outlook can better serve the basic function that such a system has in human lives and in one's role as a manager. Given that morality is not something fixed but a continuous process, the key moral responsibility of a manager is to commit oneself to moral growth.

Introduction

"Morality is a continuing process not a fixed achievement." (Dewey 1998, p. 322)

Every choice the manager makes is an opportunity to either grow or decline morally. Every choice sustains a double relation to the self, as John Dewey (1998, p. 342) notes: It "reveals the existing self", making visible the past that has shaped you into the being you are. But it also "forms the future self." Herein lies human freedom, human agency, and the opportunity to become a better person than what one used to be: "In choosing this object rather than that, one is in reality choosing what kind of person or self one is going to be" (Dewey 1998, p. 342).

Pragmatism pushes ethics back to the everyday. Ethics is not about esoteric philosophical theorizing or formal documents about 'organizational values'. Precisely this "idolatrous worship of systematized rules" (Fesmire 2003, p. 3) has made moral philosophy so remote and irrelevant for everyday conduct. Instead, morality permeates the organizational life; potential for good or worse is present in all choices and interactions of all organizational actors. At the same time, pragmatism reminds us that there are no objectively right or wrong choices. There's no pre-existing list of principles from which one can check what action is definitely right. You and your organization most probably have a set of guiding principles, values, codes of conduct and so forth, and they can be more or less formal and explicit or informal and implicit. But one can never rest on one's oars, believing that one's principles and conduct are already perfect. Instead, one has to remain open to the possibility that one's current moral outlook could have significant self-serving biases, crucial blind spots and other shortcomings. The only way to handle such a situation responsibly is to commit oneself to moral growth – as a manager, as a human being.

"We may say that the good person is precisely the one who is most conscious of the alternative, and is the most concerned to find openings for the newly forming or growing self." (Dewey 1998, p. 353)

But, if no objective moral principles exist, how can moral growth be even possible?

What is Pragmatism?

Pragmatism as a philosophical movement saw its inception in the late 19th Century as the first truly American school of philosophy. The most prominent founding fathers were Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952) – who, inspired by the rapidly developing science, saw room for more action-oriented, practically relevant ways of thinking as compared to the existing philosophical alternatives. Although – as the often-repeated quip goes (originally from Meyer 1908, p. 326) – there are as many pragmatisms as there are pragmatists, pragmatism in general is characterized by seeing thinking (and philosophizing) as a situated activity of a goal-oriented agent, the fruits of which are fallible and ultimately cashed out in action (Martela 2015a). While some versions of pragmatism come quite close to realism (Pihlström 2005, e.g. Rescher 1999) and others lean towards post-modernism, interpretivism and constructivism (e.g. Rorty 1999), the Deweyan experientialist version of pragmatism, which aims to go beyond the classic realism vs. anti-realism distinction, seems to be, in the words of Hildebrand (2003, p. 5), "more original and, indeed, more defensible" than other versions of pragmatism (Martela 2015b). Hence, when talking about pragmatism in this chapter, I mainly have this Deweyan version in mind.

We are already engaged in an unfolding stream of experiencing in which we need to act to the best of our abilities. That is the starting point for the pragmatist way of approaching life and philosophizing (Martela 2015a; 2015b). The stream of experiencing is constantly happening, we can never close it off. And we care about the outcomes, in that some experiences are more preferable to us than others. At the same time, it seems that we have some power to influence these outcomes: a sense of agency and a

sense of being able to make choices are also part of our human condition. Ontologically, pragmatism emphasizes that the world is not something to be observed but something within which we already aim to live our lives as best we can. This is not realism or constructivism but might be better labeled as *ontological experientialism* (Martela 2015b; see also McGilvary 1939).

From an evolutionary perspective, human capacity for thinking did not evolve to *describe* the world but to enhance our capability to *act* in that world (Clark 2016). Cognitive knowledge is fundamentally one special form of action, which “like any other action, brings about changes to the world” (Baert 2003, p. 97). Accordingly, pragmatism emphasizes that all our beliefs, theories, ideas and rationalizations are in final analysis future-oriented “rules for action” (James 1907, p. 23). Instead of talking about fixed *knowledge*, Dewey recommends that we should only talk about *warranted assertions*, to emphasize the ever-evolving nature of human convictions (Dewey 1938, p. 7).

Pragmatism puts a strong emphasis on the fallible nature of all human beliefs. We cannot ignore the historicized and particular nature of all our convictions. Whether we want it or not, we “cannot recover any form of privileged neutrality, objectivity, universality, apodicticity, apriority, or modal necessity” (Margolis 1996, p. 7). Instead of examining the supposed ‘objectivity’ of knowledge, pragmatism evaluates various convictions based on their capacity to aid the agent in reaching one’s goals. Conclusions reached through inquiry are, in a way, like maps of the experiential world, giving us tools to interpret it in ways that help us orient ourselves within it. When certain beliefs and convictions have “repeatedly proved effective” in guiding us towards desired directions, these warranted assertions can serve as stable conclusions on which future inquiry can build (Dewey 1938, p. 521). The epistemological position of pragmatism might thus be labeled as *fallibilistic instrumentalism* (Martela 2015b), in that any knowledge is ultimately in the service of guiding our lives (instrumentalism) and there is nothing objective or immutable about it, as it is subject to be revised if it proves incapable of explaining or guiding future experiences (fallibilism).

To summarize, in pragmatism you are already in a situation. There is no neutral, God’s-eye view. There are no objective facts upon which to build and no pure ‘rationality’ leading to inevitable conclusions. There’s only you, already living your life, already equipped with a broad set of convictions, beliefs and values, with which you have to navigate your life as best you can.

How does morality fit into this picture?

How to be a Pragmatist about Morality?

Pragmatism grants no privileged status to moral principles, rules, theories or values. The same fallibilism applies to them as to all our other intellectual tools (Martela 2017). Instead of being in some sense ‘objective’, ‘absolute’ or ‘definitive’, they should be seen as “intellectual instruments to be tested and confirmed – and altered – through consequences effected by acting upon them” (Dewey 1960, p. 277; see also Fesmire 2003, p. 59). Further, in Dewey’s own words:

“A moral principle, such as that of chastity, of justice, of the Golden Rule, gives the agent a basis for looking at and examining a particular question that comes up. It holds before him certain possible aspects of the act; it warns him against taking a short or partial view of the act. It economizes his thinking by supplying him with the main heads by reference to which to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important considerations for which he should be on the outlook” (Dewey 1932, p. 309)

Moral reasoning and moral principles are thus instruments that we use to change our behavior for the better. Every type of analysis, including the analysis of moral activity, requires that one is in

possession of certain working tools. When facing a morally complicated situation at work or elsewhere, I cannot resolve it by merely looking at it. Instead, "I must attack it with such instruments of analysis as I have at hand. *What we call moral rules are precisely such tools of analysis.*" (Dewey 1891, p. 194 emphasis in the original.) Acquired principles and rules are records "of past moral experimentation" (Fesmire 2003, p. 59), and they are indispensable for "economizing effort in foresight" (Dewey 1922, p. 244).

We should thus see moral rules as generalizations that have proved their functionality in the past moral dilemmas. They are instances of concentrated moral wisdom through which we can criticize and attempt to improve our present behavior and particular ways of living. As Pappas (1997, p. 548) accurately concludes, "a moral theory can be an effort to articulate and make explicit ideals (in the form of kinds of character and ways of life) in order to make it available for criticism of present beliefs and institutions."

The moral life of an organization emerges through the constant interaction between various actors. "Men who live together inevitably make demands on one another", as Dewey (1930, p. 318): We expect certain behavior from each other; we hold each other responsible for their acts; we enter into debates about the proper ways of behaving in our organization; we explain and justify to others our conduct in particular situations; we educate the new recruits about the proper conduct in our organizations; we signal our moral praise and blame both verbally and non-verbally; we codify certain principles into formal rules. Through this constant interacting emerges the morality of a particular organization. As Dewey observed, people live together naturally and inevitably, and the social relations they have with each other "are expressed in demands, claims, expectations" in a way where "one persons conviction of his rights becomes for other obligations" (Dewey 1998, p. 354). Out of the interplay of these claims and obligations "there arises the general concept of Law, Duty, Moral Authority, or Right" (Dewey 1998, p. 354). Morality as a more explicit and principled set of guidelines thus emerges through the constant everyday morally loaded interaction. These principles are not objective, but ought to be taken so seriously that a person allows them to guide one's big and small decisions in life. A pragmatist is, in the words of Putnam (1990, p. 229), "staking one's life on one's ideals while recognizing that they are, in the nature of things, not final and may, (we hope, will) be improved on in the progress of the species." In other words, while moral rules, principles, obligations, virtues, expectations emerge through constant, daily interactions between human beings, they become so dominant in the worldview of most individuals that they become criteria for judging human behaviour, be it their own or that of others.

Commitment to Moral Growth as the Key Moral Responsibility of a Manager

"I grew up a bigot, living in a land of bigots. I walked, talked, acted, thought and imagined like a bigot. I had no acquaintance with blacks, and no experience or habits to prompt me to change my bigoted habits. I enjoyed my (relatively) privileged status, although I did not see my status as privileged – I saw it as reflecting some natural order of things. My upbringing and social norms blinded me to my bigotry. At that point I was unlikely to change my racist ways, since the same conditions which shaped these habits also shaped my deliberative abilities. How could I see my flaws?" (LaFollette 2001, p. 409)

When did professor Hugh LaFollette, who grew up in Nashville, Tennessee in the 1950s, become morally responsible for his bigotry? Was he responsible for having racist attitudes when he was five? How about when he was fifteen?

People's current thinking habits – their attitudes, principles, beliefs – are the results of the encounters and experiences they have had thus far in life. Growing up in a certain society leads one to adapt the norms and attitudes of that society. Should we blame a white farm-owner's son in the early 19th

Century for accepting slavery as a normal practice? Should we blame Aristotle for not condemning the slavery that was widespread in the Athens of his time? We, as members of another era, might find much to blame about the moral standards of previous eras. But can we blame the individual for growing up in that society? If one never encounters any dissonance with one's current moral habits, how can one come to question them?

In pragmatism, the focus is not on what you were in the past but what you can be in the future. Hugh LaFollette (2001, p. 409) started to encounter dissonances with the morality he was raised up with: "I watched and listened as blacks challenged their inferior legal and moral status. Their elegant words and courageous deeds clashed with my bigoted habits." At first he found ways to discount these clashes, but in the early 1960s he felt he was "forced to evolve" away from his outdated moral habits. He readily acknowledged that the alternations in his external environment had been necessary for opening the door for deliberation about his racism. Without those external changes, he would likely never have abandoned his bigoted ways. But here is the key point: while he did manage to evolve morally, many others remained the same, sticking firmly to their bigoted ways.

All of us necessarily start with a relatively narrow and less thought through moral outlook. "The presuppositions, prejudices, and confusions of one's cultural inheritance set the inescapable context for value inquiries", as Fesmire (2003, p. 12) notes. As children we simply adapt the values of our parents, friends and surrounding society, most often without any conscious reflection. Many of our moral attitudes, habits and likings occur automatically, without us having ever consciously chosen them (Haidt 2001). This automatic adoption of the moral habits of one's social surroundings is inevitable, and we have no possibility to choose in which society and era we are born. Moreover, this process goes on well beyond childhood. As freshman students in a business school, we eagerly adopt the values and norms of our professors and our fellow students. In reading business literature, we not only acquire facts and theories but also learn how we should think as business leaders and what we should value in order to succeed in this world. Unfortunately, mainstream business thinking typically allows only certain voices to be heard. Certain ideological positions are taken seriously, others are mocked and instantly dismissed. More often than not, becoming a business leader means adopting a certain worldview, certain values, certain way of living. If one mainly engages with like-minded people who have gone through the same adaptation process, one's moral outlook can become quite narrow. If one never has to justify the values one holds to others, who may hold different values, they can remain relatively undeveloped. Values might guide one's behavior even in an undeveloped state but one might not be able to offer any good reasons for why these values (and not others) should be adopted in the first place.

Given this inevitable narrowness and incompleteness of one's current moral outlook, the key responsibility of an individual - be that a manager or anybody else - is to aim to grow morally. What one cannot choose is the moral values one has grown into through one's upbringing. What one *can* choose is the attitude one has towards one's current moral outlook and principles: whether one is open to revise one's moral principles and allow them to evolve, or whether one forecloses the possibility of any progress. Dewey notes that moralists have a tendency to talk about lower and higher selves, and to think that the difference between the two is due to a difference in "definite qualities and traits" (Dewey 1998, p. 353). But perhaps, along with Dewey, the real difference should be made between those that are satisfied with their current system of morality and those that commit to an attitude of moral growth and continuous revision of their moral outlook. With regard to high and low selves,

"the only distinction [- -] that can be drawn without reducing morals to conventionality, self-righteous complacency, or a hopeless and harsh struggle for the unattainable, is that between the attained static, and the moving, dynamic self." (Dewey 1998, p. 353)

Hence, there are no objective moral standards providing protected, final judgments behind which the manager could hide. Instead, one is regularly exposed to various moral conflicts that one has to deal

with to the best of one's ability, utilizing one's current, limited moral outlook. The best one can do is to aim to grow morally – that is, to transcend the limits of one's current moral outlook.

Before going to the more practical part of how one can make such moral progress happen, a remaining intellectual challenge must be met: Can we even talk about 'moral progress' or 'moral growth' if there are no objective moral standards that could be used to evaluate such growth?

Moral Growth Without Objectivism

Let's return to the example of Hugh LaFollette, who grew up in a land of bigots but was able to abandon his bigoted ways of thinking when encountering new experiences and perspectives. It is tempting to say that the moral habits of Hugh LaFollette not only changed but changed *for the better*. Accepting the equal rights of a previously oppressed group of people sounds like moral growth, if anything. But if we maintain that there are no objective moral standards – and to be consistent in our pragmatism we must maintain that –, how can we say that one moral outlook is better than another?

The solution to this riddle is to acknowledge that, although there are no objective standards standing outside our moral practice, there are virtues that are internal to such practice. Morality as a practice has evolved (both biologically and culturally), to make living together possible. As anthropologists Rai and Fiske (2011, p. 60) argue, morality "emerges out of our need to regulate our social relationships." While our biologically emerged dispositions to care about close others (Barclay and van Vugt 2015; and see Chudek and Henrich 2011) might have been enough to hold together small tribes, the expanding size of human communities generated an acute need for a more functional system of behavioural regulation (Kitcher 2011, p. 68). Such a system was needed to allow us to be certain that even our encounters with unknown others would be peaceful and we could trust them to behave in expected ways. Without such trust, these larger human societies would collapse. Morality as a system and practice thus "functions to promote beneficial social cooperation" enabling communal life through "requiring behavior that is cooperative and considerate of the interests of others" and through refining and giving expression to feelings that make people promising partners in social cooperation (Wong 2006, p. 39). Morality fulfills this function by offering tools "to regulate cooperation, conflicts of interest, the division of labor and to specify the conditions under which some people have authority over others with respect to cooperative activities" (Wong 2006, p. 37).

Acknowledging this function of morality already makes it possible to list a number of virtues that would make a person's moral system better able to fulfill its function. Without going into details, we could state that – other things being equal – a moral system becomes better when it is 1) more consistent internally, 2) based on more defensible premises about human nature, 3) based more firmly on principles that are appealing to people beyond cultural boundaries, or 4) offers guidance that actually improves people's chances to live together harmoniously. These, and other potential virtues of moral systems, are not 'objective' attributes but stem from an understanding of the function that morality plays in human lives (Martela 2017). To invite an educative analogy, let us consider for a moment humankind's ability to build bridges: here we could state that significant progress and growth has taken place, compared to the Middle Ages. Modern bridges are more reliable, less laborious to build, and able to transcend much greater distances than Medieval bridges. This is not 'objective growth' but progress in the sense that modern bridges fulfill the functions assigned to bridges better than the old ones. Similarly, growth and progress in moral perspectives does not mean 'objective' or 'absolute' growth but growth in the capacity of a moral system to fulfill its function in a society and in people's lives (Martela 2017). Growth is thus a notion that is internal to the individual, stemming from the function of morality in one's life. As Dewey (1998, p. 322) states: "We move on from the worse and into, not just towards, the better, which is authenticated not by comparison with the foreign but in what is indigenous."

How to Grow Morally as a Manager?

Some people seem to be able to grow morally, while others remain stuck in the values, attitudes and judgments they acquired in their youth, no matter how much the world around them has changed. What distinguishes these two groups of people from each other? Our thinking habits and meta-moral attitudes can significantly influence the chance for such growth. Certain attitudes prohibit the process of growth, while others enhance it. Dewey notes that humans are by their very nature inclined to stick to their current habits: “there is always a tendency to rest on our oars, to fall back on what we have already achieved. For that is the easy course...” (Dewey 1998, p. 353). This is why we need both a conscious commitment to growth as well as certain, more specific, thinking habits to make growth possible. The following paragraphs will outline a few such habits considered especially important in ensuring moral growth.

1) Admit the incompleteness of your current moral outlook

First, one has to admit the narrowness and incompleteness of one’s current moral outlook. As Margolis aptly notes: “The most monstrous crimes the race has ever (been judged to have) perpetrated are the work of the partisans of ‘right principles’ and privileged revelation” (Margolis 1996, p. 213). There is nothing more dangerous than a person or a group that has put the blindfolds on, completely convinced of the righteousness of their cause. Moreover, it is hard to grow morally if one is confident about the unerring correctness of one’s current moral outlook. By emphasizing the fallible nature of all human knowledge, pragmatism preaches intellectual humility: one ought to remember the particularity of one’s current moral outlook and acknowledge that, whether one wants it or not, this outlook will evolve throughout one’s life course. In the future, it is quite possible for any one of us to find fault in some of our current moral principles and attitudes. If we accept that this is likely to happen, then we are more open to see the blind spots we already have. Self-assuredness makes us blind to our blind spots, and defensive when encountering them. Thus, we easily refuse to admit that we have blind spots, even when they become evident. A commitment to growth means, instead, that encountering a blind spot is a reason to celebrate, because this encounter makes it possible to do something about the discovered shortcoming, and thus to grow.

2) Seek opportunities to expand your moral horizon

Second, one should seek out opportunities to expand one’s moral horizon through engagement with people and ideas that are opposed to one’s current beliefs. For Hugh LaFollette (2001, p. 409), for example, the process of moral growth started when he encountered the “elegant words and courageous deeds” of the members of civil rights movement. In order to become even aware of our personal convictions and attitudes, we need contradicting voices. The various viewpoints provided by people who are different from us are necessary tools that enable us to truly see and critically evaluate our own views. Corporations tend to have a certain kind of culture that attract a certain kind of people, and this homogeneity of thinking too often intensifies at the higher levels in the organizational hierarchy. To avoid the dangers of groupthink (see Aldag & Fuller, 1993) and the blind spots resulting from lack of diverging perspectives, managers should consciously ensure that they engage with people from diverse backgrounds. Within the organization, this means considering and encouraging boardroom heterogeneity. Hafsi & Turgut (2013), for example, show that boardroom diversity is positively related to corporate social performance, and Bear et al. (2010) demonstrate that a higher number of women on boards tends to be associated with better corporate social responsibility. Outside the work context, managers would benefit from interacting with other people, books, documentaries, works of art and various media that provide a broad set of perspectives, including those that are far from their own current worldview. A manager who wants to expand their moral perspective needs to break free from the ‘usual circles’ of like-minded fellow managers and seek out and listen to those voices that provide more critical opinions about current managerial practices and ways of conducting business.

3) Give others' opinions and viewpoints a charitable interpretation

Third, when encountering a view different from one's own, it is critical to approach such a view in the right way. When someone disagrees with us or criticizes us, we have a tendency to enter into a protective combat mode, where our key concern is to downplay the other's arguments. We look for weaknesses in the argument, we deliberately misinterpret it to more easily dismiss it, and so forth. Unfortunately, such antagonistic approach does not help us grow morally but rather locks us even more firmly into our current belief system. In approaching a contradicting viewpoint, we should remember the first of Daniel Dennett's (2013) so-called Rapaport's Rules: "You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, 'Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way.'" Peter Elbow (1973) notes that, when encountering new arguments, we tend to play the 'doubting-game', critically looking for errors and weaknesses. While this is important, we should put equal emphasis on playing the 'believing game.' In the believing game one intentionally aims to believe the argument. One tries "to have that experience of meaning" as regards the argument (p. 165): How should the argument be interpreted so it would be most believable and make most sense? Although it is often difficult from a psychological point of view, the principle of charitable interpretation is our best friend on the path towards learning from the arguments of others. As Elbow notes:

"By believing an assertion we can get farther and farther into it, see more and more things in terms of it or 'through' it, use it as a hypothesis to climb higher and higher to a point from which more can be seen and understood." (Elbow 1973, p. 163)

4) Keep your values and beliefs up to date

The world around us keeps evolving. Beliefs and convictions that were seemingly well grounded in a certain time and place might become increasingly outdated. To keep up, one needs to follow one's time. Pay attention to the values of the next generation: How are they challenging the status quo and the convictions you grew up with? We tend to become protective and defensive when confronting such challenges to our dearly held values and convictions but moral growth requires us to overcome this instinctive defensiveness:

"A self that was truly moral under a set of former conditions may become a sensuous, appetitive self when it is confronted with a painful need for developing new attitudes and devoting itself to new and difficult objectives" (Dewey 1998, p. 353)

5) Engage in moral imagination

Dewey emphasized the role of imagination in our moral growth. Humans have a unique capability of upholding various convictions in their mind to see how the world would look if viewed through those convictions. This mental simulation allows us to momentarily abandon our current attitudes and beliefs (at least partially), and imagine how we would react, act, and think if we approached the world from a different worldview. In other words, "creatively tapping a situation's possibilities" (Fesmire 2003, p. 65) becomes possible through imagination. Such leaps of imagination are conducive to growth, as they allow us to broaden the perspectives from which to approach various moral dilemmas. They also allow us to look at our own present convictions 'from the outside', from a point of view that we presently do not hold, which often is illuminative. In organizational contexts, moral imagination is also about the ability to understand one's actions "from a number of different perspectives, the actualizing of new possibilities that are not context-dependent, and the instigation of the new process of evaluating those possibilities from a moral point of view" (Werhane 1999, p. 5). As Werhane (1999) argues, often managers experience moral failure because they are entrapped in a narrow economic focus, thus failing to judge their decisions from the point of view of moral standards. Consequently, moral imagination is about remembering to imagine the moral consequences of one's actions, and is thus a key part of the manager's moral growth.

6) Ensure that your subordinates dare to challenge you

Finally, it is important to note that being in the position of a manager places an increased burden on the individual to take personal responsibility for their moral growth. This is because the higher up you are in the hierarchy the less others dare to challenge you. Usually, people can outsource part of their moral growth to people around them: others can tell us when we have transgressed moral boundaries, through praise and condemnation they can teach us about the currently upheld moral norms, our blind spots and our shortcomings. But the steeper the power distance between ourselves and the others, the less likely it becomes that people dare to say anything to us when we engage in morally questionable practices. To take a contemporary example, one key reason for why film producer Harvey Weinstein was able to keep on sexually harassing and abusing young actresses for decades was that nobody dared to challenge him. He had too much power: he could make or break people's careers.

Thus, as a manager, our best insurance against a path of moral decline is to ensure that those around us dare to challenge us. A morally responsible manager must create an atmosphere where people know that they will not suffer even when they bring up inconvenient truths and opinions about their manager's behavior. One must encourage people to speak up and be straight with one. And when somebody dares to do that the manager must reward the behavior even if it hurts, to set an example and encourage others to similarly speak up. It might even make sense to come up with structural solutions like anonymous whistle-blowing channels that ensure the manager will hear what subordinates really think about the behavior of their superiors. Remaining calm and praising people who challenge us is psychologically difficult. But part of the process of growing up to become a manager is being able to behave according to what the role requires, while overcoming one's own primitive protective feelings.

Being the top dog can easily lead to a vicious circle: the higher up an individual is positioned in the management hierarchy, the harder it is for subordinates to speak their mind in this individual's presence. This can easily lead to the manager feeling that, instead of being frank, people are scheming behind one's back. This anticipation of hidden threats leads the manager to become overly defensive in reaction to any challenges, thus further discouraging subordinates from speaking up. To break this self-reinforcing cycle, the higher up one is in the management hierarchy, the more one should make a conscious effort to ensure that the organization's culture and practices, as well as one's own behavior, encourage people across the organization to speak up.

Conclusion

In a world without objective moral standards, the morality of a manager is a never-ending journey. Despite its fallible and incomplete nature, the moral outlook we happen to presently hold is all we have when facing a morally loaded situation. The only remedy is to attempt to grow morally. In other words, the lack of external evaluative standards means that one is responsible for cultivating and developing one's moral outlook to escape the blind spots, biases, and narrowness that almost inevitably plague the morally uncultivated self. Through self-cultivation, we aim to develop a moral outlook that is more capable of considering the same situation from a wider set of viewpoints, ensuring a more reflectively chosen, and more defensible, course of action. As Dewey puts it:

"The more numerous our habits the wider the field of possible observation and foretelling. The more flexible they are, the more refined is perception in its discrimination and the more delicate the presentation evoked by imagination." (Dewey 1922, p. 175–176)

Making moral growth happen requires humbleness with regard to one's current moral outlook, a curiosity towards conflicting moral outlooks, and a commitment to the goal of expanding one's moral outlook to better accommodate a variety of contradicting voices, perspectives and values. The bad news is that we never arrive at a point where our morality is foolproof and ready. The good news is that the attitude of moral cultivation makes it easier to find common ground with others, and especially with people who initially disagree with us. Advertising the superiority of one's moral

position usually leads to the other participant not listening to you and thus refusing to change. Being less self-assured can lead to a more humble and dialogical path, which in the best case leads to the moral growth of both participants.

By placing a moral growth focused attitude at the forefront of managerial action, pragmatism offers one way to look at the quality of managerial morals. Irrespective of the content of a manager's current moral commitments and actions, it is also important to examine how open they are to moral growth: Do they allow new information to change their views, do they actively seek new perspectives and welcome views that challenge them? When criticized, or after having committed a moral transgression, do they become defensive and closed, or are they able to remain open and receptive to a possible expansion of their moral horizon? These are the questions that determine the moral growth potential of a manager. As Dewey notes, a good person is precisely the one who "is the most concerned to find openings for the newly forming or growing self" (Dewey 1998, p. 353). In other words, one becomes a morally good manager by actively looking for chances to grow morally, to cultivate one's morality. Moral goodness is not about *being* good but constantly *becoming* good.

Cross References

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