

## Exercising Concepts of Virtue Ethics in Business Culture

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**Abstract:** Business culture is an intriguing platform. Each company seeks better position, name, popularity, security and success. Overpowered with technology and intensifying outsourcing, today, the world seems very mechanical. Achieving goals and targets are no more velvety in business culture. The ceaseless run towards dreams and goals often lead to short cut methods like using unethical means, corrupted ways and exemption from social benevolence for business growth. Though initial results are satisfying but long terms achievements are doomed with downfall and failure over the business culture. At this expositional state, it has become increasingly important that business culture must ensure their welfare to be more productive in competitive market for longer terms. Great philosophers from the past have contributed towards being ethical and virtuous in ample amount to which many companies adhere. This paper focuses on the application of virtue ethics in today's business culture scenario so as to promote both corporate and public good. The paper also emphasizes the point by giving examples of great companies around the world who have exhibited the virtuous acts only to be the top companies around the world so far.

**Keywords:** Ethics, virtue theory, business culture, life skills

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### I. Introduction

An individual's perception is highly culture influenced. People act and interact according to what their culture has bestowed upon. From the beginning of childhood till the end of time it is culture that has helped to learn values and moral beliefs. It is culture which determines our ethics and morality or teaches us good or bad. The roots of ethics have been very deeply understood as a branch of philosophy by many authors and researchers who believed that incorporating the concept of ethics in life leads to satisfaction and bliss. A major part of life is associated with employment, profession or position at workplaces and business and so are ethics.

Jeurissen believes that in business ethics "power and influence are not decisive criteria here, but rather which interests are morally justified" (Jeurissen & Rijst 2007 14). In his book "Professional Ethics" R Subramanian defines ethics as "a branch of philosophy, or specifically moral philosophy that studies the evolution of concepts such as right and wrong behaviour". (Subramanian 2013 3) Ethics deals with the study of moral code of conduct that governs our behaviour, to do things which are right or wrong, good or bad. The doctrines of ethics have been in presence since a very long time. Subramanian further mentions about the ancient Indian texts like Vedas and Upanishads which included ethical principles like truthfulness, philanthropy, gratitude, forgiveness. The Buddhist thoughts, he claims extolled chastity from hurting or killing living beings, stealing, telling lies.

The great philosopher and thinker of all times Aristotle emphasized on the role of character and virtue as a predominant principle of ethics. In his book "The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle" Aristotle mentions "For some hold that happiness lies in virtue, (...)". (Aristotle 1879 19). Aristotle contemplates whether happiness is achieved by individuals through habituation, or practise, or blessing from the divine or merely by chance and finally concludes, "Happiness, at all events, (...), but is acquired by virtuous action, and by a course of teaching, or of some such other practise, is clearly an object most divine" ( 22).

Confucius a Chinese thinker and also a social philosopher was also a follower of virtue theory of ethical principles. For Confucius the prime concern was to find a good person who had a good character, virtuous and does something for the sake of humanity. In the book "The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle: mirrors of virtue" Jiyuan Yu writes, "First, the concern of Confucius is to find the human dao, ie the way to become a good person. Second to become a good person, one must cultivate de that is a dispositional character (...). Confucius calls this dispositional character ren (...) is also widely referred to as virtue (...)". The Confucian concept of the good man, that is the man equipped with ren, usually translated as "gentleman" as "a man of complete virtue". (Yu 2009). The central theme of Confucian virtue ethics included personal morality, justice, sincerity, virtue politics, self cultivation, moral emotion and reasoning.

Socrates identified virtue as the simplest and the most powerful form of human existence. In the book “Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics” Kevin Hermberg edited “Socrates has arrived at the view that the virtue of justice is fundamentally a matter of the soul’s being well-ordered (...)” (Hermberg 2015 54) Socrates believed in the virtue of knowledge or wisdom as good and ignorance as evil. When people have lot of wealth, name and fame, pride and arrogance because of their status, beauty or profession they sometimes get way ward or spoilt. But if they are virtuous they can never have arrogance and thus can never be spoilt.

Hence virtue can be summed up as a characteristic trait of a person that is both good for the person and also good for people around. Concepts of kindness, honesty, integrity, tolerance, self-regard and people –regard, wisdom, fairness, temperance, courage, love, morality, code of conduct, gratitude, managing emotions, and self awareness is defined to be the secret ingredient of a beautiful work culture and many more are a set of virtues which are consider similar with life skills. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the relevance of virtue ethics in today’s business scenario in order to achieve long term success promoting both corporate and public good. The paper contributes examples of reputed companies around the world who perform their professional duties and responsibilities keeping in mind the ethics they ought to follow thus delivering and setting high paradigm to others.

Each virtue is important aspects of our lives that profoundly governs our behaviour and ultimately character. Each virtue gives strength to our self, a strength to our character making it our character strength. In the book “Character strengths and virtues: A Handbook of classification, Volume 1” Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman study, survey and classify all major religions around the world and the virtues practised by them finally concluded with twenty – four distinct strengths under six inclusive categories of virtues. These virtues are wisdom and knowledge, courage humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence which included creativity, curiosity, open- mindedness, love for learning, perspective and wisdom, bravery, persistence, integrity, love, kindness, social intelligence, loyalty, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self regulation and self control, appreciation, gratitude hope, humour and spirituality respectively. (<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/classification-character-strengths-virtues/>, 2017).

Emma Taylor at Jubilee centre for Character and Virtues in 2014 suggest another set of virtue for character measurement. Emma sees character as a bunch of personal attributes or a tendency that give rise to distinct emotions , motivate and guide our code of conduct– “the positive qualities or dispositions within character being ‘virtues’ for us, or what others might call ‘character strengths’ or ‘life skills’” (Taylor, "Thinking about the virtues of character measurement" 2016 2). It was understood that there are four main virtue types namely moral virtue, intellectual virtue, performance virtue and civic virtue each consisting of different range of virtue under them. Moral virtue includes virtues like courage, compassion, gratitude, trust, honesty, kindness. Intellectual virtue includes cooperation, reason and judgement, tolerance, open-mindedness. Performance virtue emphasizes on accountability, resilience, determination, confidence, leadership. Lastly, civic virtue includes service, awareness, social justice, community awareness and others.

The virtue ethics emphasizes more on character development than focusing on the morality of an action or the consequences of that action. The traits of virtue are innate but also they can be nurtured or practised. However, once fixed the traits get deeply rooted. The virtue ethics suggests while it is easy to show an act of generosity or kindness at a given situation that doesn’t make any one kind or a virtuous person. Rather if the virtue of kindness is within the character naturally and which doesn’t alter at any given circumstances then that makes a person good or virtuous. These virtues make life better and easier encouraging and making life of others too in that way. It is often the character of a person that helps build relationships with others, manage a plethora of different situations, handle emotions, solve problems related to various issues, practice self awareness and many more. These virtues are synonymous to the abilities or skills otherwise known as life skills. Life skills are identified as a “set of skills for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (Wikipedia, 2017). Life skills apply to a broad gamut of skills and affect many areas of life like self, family, friends, work and leisure.

## **II. SCOPE TO INTEGRATE ETHICS AT WORK PLACE**

Work place is a pivotal focus of a person’s life. It is important to understand that success comes only to those who are virtuous throughout their life. With vices there may be a rise in business but that is temporary. After all character plays an important role in being successful. A virtuous attitude towards work, colleagues and organisation accessorized with the various other aspects of ethics aforementioned is defined to be the secret ingredient of a beautiful work culture. Maintaining a high set of ethics in business is benevolent not only to the leaders or subordinates but also to the organisation as a whole. “In business, this is critical, because how people see you and your company is the basis of building trust. If you’re taking unethical actions, you lose credibility, and your business will suffer” (Bennett, 2014).

Many companies worldwide do not believe in ethics or morals applied in their business. All that matters to them is profit, no matter how it is earned. Such companies do not believe in virtues and thus only believe in the consequences of their action. If their actions yield them capital they ought not to waste time in moral judgements. In the book, "Business Ethics" Richard George writes in *The Myth of Amoral Business*, "(...) business and people in business are not explicitly concerned with ethics. They are not unethical or immoral; rather, they are amoral insofar as they feel that ethical considerations are inappropriate in business." (T 2011 3). He further speaks about how businesses which are not primarily focused with ethics end up making newspaper headlines as "accounts of executive fraud and malfeasance, bribery, misrepresentation, white-collar crime, kickbacks, unsafe products and insider manipulation of markets." (3) He also provides examples of Enron Arthur Anderson and WorldCom who acted unethically in their business approaches and many other industries and plants who have brought damage to environments and towns, who did anything but considered corporate social responsibilities. "(...) many businesses act unethically not because of a desire to do evil, but simply because they want to make a profit and therefore disregard some of the consequences of their actions."(p. 3).

Business policies are vast and each day the leaders of the companies worldwide strive hard to boost profit for their organisation. Many companies follow strict work ethics so much so that ethical principles run in the blood of their employee and staff members. A company's vision, mission, and purpose establish its identity. (Younkins 2017). Running a sustainable business with high ethical principles is although pivotal, the biggies firmly believe that poor ethical values or a business with no ethics will have profound impact on not only the employees or the leaders but also the business and ultimately on their recognition, status and position in the world. Therefore, any authentically powerful and reliable leaders must first acknowledge their employees about the commitment towards ethical guidelines and clearly communicate in a motivational approach to make the vision of the company a reality. The employees at the same time are required to champion the resolute needs of core ethical virtues and a sense of purpose which is the basic foundation of the company. As the employees get influenced and inspired by their virtuous leaders, a mutual agreement and commitment about the shared virtues flourishes throughout the organisation. Below are some of the vital virtue ethics as followed and backed up by examples of companies worldwide.

### **III. Honesty And Integrity**

Honesty is one of the finest virtues an individual may possess. In personal life and in business specifically, the importance of honesty doesn't merely bags appreciations but also brings to forefront that a certain person is trustworthy or reliable. Making honest business relations largely depends on providing the right information however bitter and making unbiased judgements. Charles Edward Weber claims, "Honest executives are open and straight forward in their communication. They do not use information to manipulate the situation and mislead others to gain an advantage" (Weber 1995 67). The art of staying true to one self by all means at any cost is the art of integrity. Manjit Monga in his book "Integrity in Business and Management: Cases and Theory" writes "honesty is closely related to truthfulness, but given that integrity encompasses other constituents, honesty is considered" a necessary but not sufficient condition for integrity"( Monga 2017 42). This has already been mentioned by Becker in 1998.

To substantiate this part let's take this company for example, Huntsman Corporation, an American multinational company who manufactures and markets chemical products for world class consumers and industrial customers like BMW, GE, Proctor and Gamble, Unilever and many more (Wikipedia 2017). Jon Hunstman Sr. the founder of this million dollar company "started out buying up downtrodden business with borrowed money through his Huntsman Chemical in 1982 and in 19994 he purchased 34 companies including Texaco's petro chemicals operations for \$1.6 million" (Forbes 2017). In the words of Huntsman himself in his book "Winners never cheat: Even in Difficult Times", "Succeeding or getting to the top at all costs by definition is an immoral goal. The ingredients for long-term success-courage, vision, follow-through, risk, opportunity, sweat, sacrifice, skill, discipline, honesty, graciousness, generosity- never vary." (Huntsman 2011 36). He firmly believes that shortcuts to success are enticing and very much fruitful in the beginning but "when their fall does come, it is fast, painful, embarrassing and lasting" (36). Thus honesty and integrity are one among the many foundations for an everlasting relation in various contexts most importantly in the business arena. Honesty heals, solves, restores hope and kindles confidence boosting a strong rapport with everyone.

### **IV. Corporate Social Responsibility**

According to a survey in 2012, a private global consulting firm in New York, known as Reputation Institute studied 100 most reputable multinational companies recognised worldwide. The study discovered customer's readiness "to buy, recommend, work for, and invest in a company is driven by 60% by their perceptions of the company and only 40% by their perceptions of the product (Smith 2015). The study further found that people's perceptions about the company was based on the companies' strong ethical practice termed

as corporate social responsibility. Reputation Institute believed that the company's which practise corporate social responsibility deserves an appreciation and honour. Corporate social responsibility is defined as "a corporation's initiatives to assess and take responsibility for the company's effects on environment and social well being" (Staff 2015). In other words companies which take the responsibility to provide any positive change or benefit to the society and environment leaving its naturalness untouched, along with their own prosperity are the one's which follow the ethical principle of corporate social responsibility. Today many organisations are drawing together efforts to strengthen a sense of accountability among their employees to deepen the sense of purpose and meet daily challenges.

Accountability as defined by Henry Browning in the book, "Accountability: taking ownership of your responsibility" suggests "taking ownership of projects, processes, and problems that cut across lines of position and formal responsibility. Whereas responsibility is generally delegated by the boss, the organisation, or by virtue of position, accountability is having a sense of ownership for the task and the willingness to face the consequences that come with success or failure" (Browning 2012 2). The concept of accountability denotes an individual's obligation towards actions or decisions and /or any justification or reason for such actions or decisions. Many companies around the world today assay corporate social responsibility. Forbes surveys most ethical companies every year based on different ethical principles companies around the world operate. To name a few Accenture, Microsoft, Kellogg Company, Starbucks, L'oreal and another 119 companies rank the top practising corporate social responsibility. These companies apart from creating wealth and prosperity supply to the needs of people in the society. Many companies work for the betterment of human rights, labor rights, fight corruption, philanthropy and environment upliftment.

To name one, let's take the example of General Electric which is one of world's largest and most respected companies. GE consists of a number of different and distinct departments including finance, energy, aviation, oil and gas and many more. GE is the "only member of the Dow Jones Industrial average index that ranked sixth on Interbrand's list of Best global brands and 24<sup>th</sup> on the list of Best Global Green brands, as well as making Ethisphere's 2011 list of the world's most ethical companies" (Kannel 1970). Environmental sustainability is a cardinal factor ingrained in GE's business since 130 years and has been significantly advancing in the recent years. GE's Ecomagination program a strong step towards environmental sustainability foresees future perspectives developing more on "green" technologies and product efficiency dignifying the environmental standards. The primary focus is on meeting the growing demand for renewable energy, and GE now employs nearly 5,000 people globally in its renewable energy businesses (Kannel 1970). Good corporate social responsibility makes good business.

## **V. Loyalty And Trustworthiness**

Loyalty is a core factor for a successful business running. An environment of loyalty is an accessory to achieve success at work. Loyalty generates trustworthiness in an organisation. When employees are loyal to their managers and organisation they make an extra effort to bring name and fame for them thereby fostering trust among each other. Loyalty with the company both in good and bad times is an advantage in a long term goal. In the book "An Into to Business Ethics 2E" Desjardins discusses "Loyalty is understood as a willingness to make personal sacrifices in the interest of the firm and (...) in which agents have a legal duty of loyalty, it is often claimed the employees have an ethical responsibilities to be loyal employees" (Desjardins 2009 141). Trust on the other hand, strengthens the good will and respect of everyone concerned. Trustworthy people are opted to do the right thing in a core set of virtues. Ward and Smith in their book "Trust and Mistrust" believe trust to be an essential factor in business. They claim "Businesses must concern themselves with levels of trust in all their stakeholder relationships: customers, suppliers, employees, regulators etc. Indeed, from a trust perspective it is the quality of these relationships that facilitates or inhibits the business in achieving anything it sets to do" (Ward & Smith 2003 11). Trust and loyalty help maintain balance between one another mainly in business deals reinforcing a sense of security and potentiality which has a lot to do in long term relationships. It must however be understood that loyalty among employees is as important as loyalty with clients and hence the same rule follows with the virtue of trust. Companies all over the world in order to do good business remain loyal to their customers and acquire the tag of being trustworthy. Few examples are Apple, Twitter, Toyota, Amazon and many more. At a point of doing business and a point to meet customers' trust, Google has its own code of conduct which states "Don't be evil" which believes ".It's built around the recognition that everything we do in connection with our work at Google will be, and should be, measured against the highest possible standards of ethical business conduct. Trust and mutual respect among employees and users are the foundation of our success, and they are something we need to earn every day" ("Google Code of Conduct") Setting high moral code of conduct they believe will attract loyal users.

## VI. Fairness And Justice

At present countless people are so busy running in the rat race to achieve goals and targets that they seem to be unaffected by emotions, values and following right ethics. Everyone wants to get noticed and framed in success and en route they happen to trample anything which acts as a hindrance to make the grade. Taking credits of others' contribution, blame-shifting, promotion of the undeserving are all very common unfairness acts at work place. Most of the times one feels neglected, unprivileged, and a victim to injustice. In the book "Business Ethics 2009 Update: ethical Decision Making and Cases, Ferrell , Fraedrich and Ferrell write "Justice is fair treatment and due reward in accordance with ethical or legal standards. In business this means that the decision rules used by an individual to determined the justice of a situation could be based on the perceived rights of individuals and on the intentions of the people involved in a given business interaction"(Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell 2010 159). Any action, outcome or process which is morally correct, respectable and unbiased is an act of fairness. And in this essence, the virtue of fairness sets moral values of decision making which directly affects others.

To exemplify, let's take the example of TAFE Tractors and Farm Equipment Ltd an Indian company whose annual turnover in 2014-2015 was 93 billion INR. TAFE is the third largest tractor manufacturer in the world and second in India in terms of volumes with a sale of 150000 tractors. The long lasting relationship with its stakeholders is based on fair and ethical business practices. It started with only one tractor model in 1961 but today TAFE is recognised as one of the finest mass manufacturer of tractors delivering high quality performance. Along with redeeming a number of corporate social responsibilities including healthcare, farming and agriculture, community development, encouraging traditional art forms, TAFE is widely acknowledged for embodying core values which fosters a code of conduct, governs their vision and supports their corporate strategy. TAFE has designed a new logo for its organisation symbolically depicting core ethics like "progress, energy and integrity. It portrays the value sets practised within the organisation. The outer wheel indicates enduring progress and the inner chakra infuses whorls of energy that permeate the entire organization. The inner white space attributes justice and fairness, the perfect canvas for inscribing our values" ("Corporate Profile", 2017)

## VII. Leadership And Commitment

Leaders are the torch bearer of a company and their leadership qualities are essential supporting guidelines for the company. Leaders are expected to build a culture of virtue and impart a sense of commitment among the employees that become a source of inspiration in the company. In the book "Leadership and business ethics" Flynn conveys "(...) effective leadership, combined with the right ethical environment for business, constitutes indispensable foundational elements for the creation of a world-class economy" (Flynn 2010 41).A virtuous leadership in business is effective and morally aligned. Leadership begins with the acquisition of commitment in mind and apparently serving the needs of the company, customers, employees, clients and any one linked to a firm. One of the major virtues a leader along with leadership qualities has to practice is the virtue of commitment. Today, more business organisations want to continue doing business with organisations who stick to their words, ethical principles and working styles. Commitment creates a treasured work environment that provides a platform for long term business. "Commitment is a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one and more targets." (Cohen 2003 xi).

It would be apt here to support the virtues of leadership and commitment with one of the world's greatest leaders of food and beverage company, Nestle present in 191 countries around the world. The core value of commitment hails back to 150 years ago when "Henri Nestle created an infant cereal that saved the life of a child. Since then Nestle had been developing rapidly with a net worth of more than \$130 as in 2014" (Nestle, "About Us"). In the words of the Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer of Nestle Sir Peter Brabeck-Letmathe and Sir Paul Bulcke respectively, "we have built our business on the fundamental principle that to have long-term success for our shareholders, we not only have to comply with all applicable legal requirements and ensure that all our activities are sustainable, but additionally we have to create significant value for society. At Nestlé we call this Creating Shared Value. (...)Nestlé incorporated all ten principles of the United Nations Global Compact soon after their creation and continues to implement them today. (...)We believe in the importance of a strong compliance culture that is fully embedded in our business. The Corporate Business Principles and the supporting documents reflect this commitment and thus protect the trust of our consumers and other stakeholders in the Nestlé brand" ( C&C, 2010 3) A company is proficient to achieve such identity following ethical rules and an ability to move ahead towards its vision and wholly concentrating on its commitment. Developing virtuousness inherently develops an affluent business enterprise.

## VIII. Conclusion

Virtue is an important constituent in business arena and an essential means of fostering good and successful business. Unethical use of business strategies is considered duntrodden an inappropriate for long

term goals. This paper studied the virtue ethics as prescribed centuries ago by great thinkers and the incorporation of the same in business matters today. The scope of integrating virtue ethics in workplace though sounds immaterial to many big companies, the results are obvious. Defamation, calumny, scornfulness are some of the consequences while otherwise harbingers joy, long term happiness and success and subsequently popularity around the world. This paper studied few virtue ethics as practised by reputed companies around the world and though most of them a century old still relish name fame and distinction. The responsibility towards both society and corporate is an effective virtue of mutual development and it greatly meets the requirements of high ethical values. The virtue ethics takes collected efforts by leaders of the organisations to change the business prospects wholly. Today's business world is spreading rapidly across the globe. Today businesses can't have hidden agenda. Apparently, the leaders of the companies must chose to proceed with their dealings very imperatively. Leaders can earn public trust and corporation only by proper verdicts supported by personal and corporate virtues and delivering high standard ethics.

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