Upgrading the Ethical Decision-Making Model for Business   by David W. Gill (2004)

Published in Business and Professional Ethics Journal 23.4 (Winter 2004): 135-151

One of my favorite statements about decision-making was in Woody Allen's "My Speech to the Graduates" (1980): "More than at any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."[i] Often enough our options in business ethical decision-making seem to range from the unpleasant to the tragic. But, as in the case of Woody Allen's speech, we may not be seeing all the possibilities.

My paper proposes several ways of strengthening and enriching decision-making in business ethics. A major source for my own revisionist thinking about business ethics has been my work in Christian ethics over the years. Some of what I have learned in the business ethics guild has found its way across the bridge into my Christian ethics teaching and writing. But the other direction is fruitful as well and some of the themes and emphases of Christian ethics can help strengthen our business ethics. Appropriating these ethical themes and insights from Scripture does not, however, require acts of faith and religious commitment; common sense and business experience point to the same conclusions.

There can be no doubt about the importance of decision-making. It is a basic human distinctive. We possess a capacity for self-transcendence, for reflection and choice. We do not just submit to our instinct or conditioning. Not to exercise that decision-making faculty, or not to be allowed to do so, is quite literally a dehumanizing experience. Philosophers, theologians, and others have paid a lot of attention to decision-making over the centuries. And, of course, decision-making is a critical part of business. The fate of companies and careers often turns on the quality of our decisions.

Ethical decision-making is concerned with matters of right and wrong, good and bad. The context is often one of dilemmas or quandaries in which it is not clear how one should decide (or what the right thing to do is in the circumstances). Certainly one obvious argument for renewed attention to our subject is the long and depressing list of bad decisions made by business leaders in the scandals of the past decade. Kenneth Lay, Andrew Fastow, Dennis Kozlowski, Martha Stewart and so many others made wrong decisions with terrible consequences not just for themselves but for many others, most of them innocent.

It is worth asking, of course, whether Ken Lay and the other corporate malefactors failed because they lacked a good decision-making method. Perhaps that was part of the problem but I'm not at all sure that the standard decision-making schemes would have saved them (or us). The critical decisions they mishandled were at a deeper level (What are my values? Am I above the law? What is my mission? What will be my legacy? Do I really want to serve my self-interest alone? Etc.). The standard account of decision-making may fail by being too narrow, that is, focused on immediate dilemmas and quandaries and neglecting more basic and fundamental matters. In any case, it is rare to open the daily newspaper and not find multiple reports of unethical and illegal business behavior---despite the growth of business ethics education and training in recent decades. So it is a very practical concern that drives our quest for improvement in our approach to ethical decision-making.

A second reason for another look at ethical decision-making in business is to provide something better than the pop business writers are offering. A fair number of business leaders out in the trenches must be reading things like *There's No Such Thing As "Business Ethics"-- There's Only ONE RULE for Making Decisions* by best-selling "leadership" writer John Maxwell, whose various books occupy precious shelf space in the business sections of bookstores everywhere.[ii] While Maxwell's various collections of thoughts on leadership may be helping some of his readers, I have to say that his approach to business ethics and decision-making is terribly misleading.

Maxwell writes: "An ethical dilemma can be defined as an undesirable or unpleasant choice relating to a moral principle or practice. . . Do we do the easy thing or the right thing?" (p. 5). A dilemma is a problematic, difficult situation but to describe it in terms of "undesirable" and "unpleasant" puts far too much emphasis on psychological factors (desire, pleasure) and fails to highlight the issue of *harm* that is

at the core of ethics. Second, for Maxwell to pose the dilemma as "easy" versus "right" is also naïve and misleading. Ethical dilemmas are such because of the difficulty in figuring out what is the right thing to do; what is right is not self-evident. For example, do we lay off these loyal workers and offshore their jobs? Maybe that will be good for our customers and shareholders, and good for the offshore economy. But it will likely be bad for our loyal workers, and may be bad for our long-term reputation and brand. It is ridiculous to say this is about "easy" versus "right."

Maxwell goes on to say "There are really only two important points when it comes to ethics. The first is a standard to follow. The second is the will to follow it." (p. 23). But what is the relevant standard in this situation? And how can we bring about the "will" to do the right thing once we figure it out? These are not simple questions though Maxwell leaps past them as though they are. Maxwell overlooks the challenge of figuring out how we should apply our ethical values and guidelines to this or that situation and dilemma. What is our method? Who needs to be part of the decision-process? Who are the stakeholders and how do we respect their various interests and claims, especially when they conflict?

Maxwell argues that the one and only ethical guideline needed is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." No doubt this is a powerful, often helpful principle aiding our decision-making. But while Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, taught this "rule" to a band of disciples, not to an isolated, rugged individualist, Maxwell tears it out of its context and makes *self* interest the criterion of right action. What I want done to me may (unless I am a masochist) prevent me from doing some injustice; but it would not, for example, prevent a tough guy-type from misapplying his tough guy tactics to all others. That is why Jesus and other wise teachers emphasize community discernment and action. Maxwell is also wrong to say that the Golden Rule is the one and only rule we need. It has wide *generality*, but not exclusivity or sufficiency, as Maxwell claims. It is not the only ethical principle. Unlike Maxwell, Jesus didn't limit his ethical teaching to the Golden Rule. Maxwell's decision-making model fails by being simplistic and naïve. We need to find and promote a better way.

The textbook that I most often use in MBA ethics courses is Linda Trevino and Katherine Nelson's *Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk About How to Do It Right.*[iii] It is helpful to see their eight-step approach alongside what we have just seen from John Maxwell. Maxwell calls us to a little bit of their step 6 and a whole lot of their step 8 but dismisses explicitly or implicitly the rest of the process. Here are their eight steps in making sound ethical decisions in business:

     1. Gather the <u>facts</u>. This is a critical point of departure for Trevino and Nelson and for anyone serious about ethics.

     2. Define the ethical issues or <u>values.</u> What is it that is ethically at stake or in conflict?

     3. Identify affected parties, <u>stakeholders</u>. This is partly a factual matter but Trevino and Nelson also challenge the decision-maker to empathy, to see the dilemma from other stakeholders' perspectives.

     4. Identify <u>consequences</u>. This step acknowledges the potential insights of utilitarianism and other consequentialist approaches.

     5. Identify <u>obligations.</u> This step acknowledges the potential insight of Kantian and other non-consequentialist ethical approaches.

     6. Consider your <u>character</u> and integrity. This step acknowledges the potential insight of virtue and character ethics.

     7. <u>Think creatively</u> about potential actions. Imagination and creativity get lost in many accounts of ethics but their role can be critical.

     8. Check your <u>gut.</u> Your intuition, feelings, or conscience may help you resolve the dilemma.

Trevino and Nelson have outlined a fairly comprehensive, wise, and practical approach. They also urge managers to try to prepare themselves in advance, by learning the company's rules, asking lots of questions, and developing relationships that can help when facing tough challenges. The eight steps they outline are echoed by many other business ethics writers, though their presentation seems both more holistic and comprehensive and more practical and down-to-earth than most other accounts.

Toward More Practical and Comprehensive Ethical Decision-Making

The task of this essay is to reflect on the ethical decision-making process in business from a Christian perspective. What insights and perspectives might a Christian standpoint contribute?   My own way of teaching decision-making to business students (and to people in the workplace, at any level of responsibility) has been to focus attention on four phases of the encounter with an (actual or possible) ethical problem.[iv]

First, *recognize* whether you are facing a possibly serious ethical problem (or not). Six test questions provide what I believe is a reliable and comprehensive method for detecting serious issues (and leaving aside matters that are not specifically ethical in nature). Second, if a serious ethical issue has been recognized, we must then *strategize* about what to do. Third, if we cannot simply hand off the issue to the ethics department or to our supervisor, we must carefully *analyze* the issue and figure out our best options in terms of responses. Fourth, we must do our best to *resolve* the issue. How might Christian ethics bridge over to the business ethics arena and provide some insight on this process?

Mission, Purpose and Ethics

Before directly unpacking the four-stage recognize/strategize/analyze/resolve method, three important preliminaries provide an essential texture for the whole enterprise. The first of these is mission, or "core purpose." Ethical decision-making, like all aspects of business, is (or ought to be) carried out in light of, and in service of, the overarching mission and purpose of the company. The ultimate, overarching mission both motivates and guides decision-making.

Jewish and Christian ethical reflection notes that the Decalogue, for example, begins with the clarification of "who is going to be god" here: "You shall have no other gods before me." The great rabbinical and theological commentators on the Decalogue have pointed out that the next nine commands are statements of the implications of having that god (Yahweh) on the throne. "Our gods determine our goods," we could say. Our purpose drives our ethics. The Bible is full of such teleological thinking: clarify your ultimate mission and purpose, then count the cost, prepare, plan, and execute. The negative lesson should also not be missed: put something like money on the throne, and don't be surprised by the negative ethical consequences that flow from such a mission.

Aristotle's teleological ethics and Jim Collins and Jerry Porras's "preserve the core" mantra in their *Built to Last* make the same basic point.[v] In an important and now classic essay on this topic, Douglas Sherman wrote, "The values that govern the conduct of business must be conditioned by the 'why' of the business institution. They must flow from the purpose of business, carry out that purpose, and be constrained by it."[vi]   If businesses want to promote wise ethical decision-making and healthy corporate cultures, they should first get clear about why they are in business, what their purpose is.

The Character of the Moral Agent

Second preliminary point: moral agents are more than mere rational decision-making machines. You may be able to transfer logical reasoning skills to another person but that does not guarantee wise ethical discernment or performance. Plato and Aristotle and most pre-Modern thinkers saw moral agency as more than decision-making skill. It is about character---the composite of who we are. Character is our ensemble of habits, traits, capacities, and inclinations. To use a sports metaphor: you cannot perform a given "play" unless you have the conditioning, the physical capacity to carry it out. In ethics, you may know something intellectually but be unable to carry it out without the requisite strength of character.

The Christian-biblical perspective on this topic is clear. Jesus' program is not just "you need a new set of rules and a sharpened up decision-making method"----but rather "you need to be born again." St. Paul writes about "putting off the old self" and "putting on the new"---not just about "correctly applying this moral rule." It is about *who* you are, what kind of person you are. It is not just that you memorize a moral rule forbidding embezzlement but that you develop a generous, honest character free of greed. It is not just recalling the rule against sexual or ethnic harassment but that you have a character that habitually respects and values all people as made in the image of God. It is not just that you can objectively

categorize something as wrong or right, but that you "hate what is evil and cleave to what is good" (Romans 12:9). It is about multi-dimensional persons (with histories, feelings, personalities, etc.), not just reasoning machines. Christianity and the Bible are not the only sources for this stress on moral character but anytime Christians are interested in improving the ethical health of organizations, this emphasis on recruiting and training for ethical character ought to be a central aspect of what they bring to the discussion.

Many business ethics teachers and writers make a category error when they list "virtue ethics" as an option in a decision-making theory parallel to the theories of Kant or Mill (Trevino and Nelson are partly guilty of this). They suggest that you first raise a Kantian question: what are our duties or other's rights in this case? Then a Millian question: how can we bring about the best consequences (for the greatest number)? Then, in the same way, a virtue ethics question: how does this affect or reflect on my character? This way of locating virtue/character ethics is not very helpful.

Our character is not just the source of a third theoretical question but is the backdrop and context behind all our reasoning and all decision-making. Virtue ethics is about who you are whether faced with a dilemma or not. It is about your ongoing, habitual traits and capacities; it is not simply a decision-making theory or strategy like deontology or teleology provide; to treat it as such is to lose something very important. The implication is that businesses should hire, train, and promote people of good character--- not just people of high technical skill and reasoning skill--- if they want to have good ethical decision-making and performance.

A Community of Ethical Discernment and Action

Third, the ethical life is a community affair, not an individual one. Ethics is a team sport not a solo one. "Let us (plural) make humankind (plural) in our image" the Creator says about the co-humanity he makes (Genesis 1). In fact, the only negative statement in the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 is, "It is not good for one to dwell alone." All the great ethical instruction of Scripture was given to communities, not individuals. The Decalogue was given to a congregation, not an individual; the Sermon on the Mount was taught to the band of disciples, not an individual. Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two, not one-by-one. He promised to be present "wherever two or three are gathered in my name," and charged them that "if two or three agree," what is bound on earth is bound in heaven. St. Paul taught that each person is one member of "the body of Christ," and that all such members are necessary. The wisdom literature urges that in the multitude of counselors there is wisdom.[vii]

Anthropologists and sociologists have shown that morality is a social construction. The ancient philosophers saw ethics as embedded in politics, in the sense that the individual good is interdependent with well-ordered, just communities.   The individualism of the Modern era, accentuated in America's cultural myths of the "Rugged Individual," runs radically counter not just to Christian thought but to the thinking and practice of most people in the history of the world.

Because their Scripture repeatedly teaches the critical importance of community, Christians must not fall into the individualist error of someone like John Maxwell. Ethical decision-making is not just an individual exercise in abstract logic. Determining the relevant rules, predicting the likely consequences, and arriving at the wisest decision---these challenges are always more effectively addressed if we are working in community. Community helps us *figure out* what is right and then helps us *carry out* what is right. The implication for business is to recruit team players and build and reward team effort, including the effort to make good decisions.

Recognizing Genuine Ethical Dilemmas

With these preliminary but essential features in place (mission, character, and community), the first phase of ethical decision-making will be to determine whether a particular question, issue, or action is of serious ethical importance. It may be that our concern is really a matter of taste and manners rather than ethics and morality. It may be a question of technical competence or managerial preference rather than ethics. There are many business dilemmas that are not really moral or ethical in nature. In these cases,

of course, wise and good decision-making is still critical, but our concern is focused on detecting problems of ethical importance.

One simple test question is inadequate for this process. Just as there is no single, omniscient ethical czar or judge, there is not one single test question. Our best chance of not letting matters of ethical significance get past us is to use several tests. My proposal relies on six questions (or six criteria).

Legal & Ethical Codes.

First, is there a potentially serious question of <u>illegality</u>?   Second, does it violate company (or professional) ethics? These two initial tests rely on the values and judgments enshrined in <u>ethics codes</u> and standards articulated by governments and by organizational and professional groups. These are straightforward compliance tests. If something is happening that seems to violate laws and regulations--- or the code of ethics of our company or our profession, a red flag should pop up and we may need to take the problem to the next phase and strategize what to do about it.

Generally speaking, our laws and regulations are the social compact we agree to about how we should behave in our society; anyone who lives within the jurisdiction of the law is expected to comply with it---or try to change it through constitutional means. So too, our acceptance of employment at a company usually means explicitly agreeing to observe its code of ethics. Membership in a profession also entails agreement with its code of ethics.

How do these compliance tests look in a Christian perspective? While the biblical teaching is that a Christian's primary "citizenship" and loyalty is in the "kingdom of God," Jesus, Paul, and others in the Bible counsel submission (in general) to the rule of the state and its laws. Such governing authorities are not merely to be tolerated but can be seen as the possible instruments of God to support the good and inhibit the bad (Romans 13:1-7). The exception to this general policy is when Caesar's requirements clearly contradict those stated by God, in which cases "We must obey God rather than human authority" (Acts 5:29).

Thus the laws of the state and the ethical guidelines of companies and professions are our first two guidelines, but they are not sufficient. There is a higher authority; a law may not be in accordance with the ethical right. No one nation or political entity or company or profession can claim perfection. Questioning moral authority is part of the Christian vocation. Sometimes laws are morally wrong, as when slavery or other morally repugnant activities have been legal. Sometimes they are morally silent, as when a government does not forbid dangerous toxic chemical discharges that endanger human or environmental health. Just because something is legal (or illegal), or the law is silent, does not make it right. We need some additional tests.

Individual Conscience.

The third test question is "Does it violate people's consciences and personal values?" Of course, people's consciences and personal values vary to some extent. A conservative Irish Catholic, a Muslim, a feminist, and a high school kid in the suburbs may be ethically sensitive to very different issues. But every person has some kind of interior moral "compass" that should be respected (though not necessarily agreed or complied with) by others. In Christian tradition, the source of this moral compass or conscience is the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" eaten by our first ancestors. Though this was "Plan B" ethical knowledge, the Bible is clear that this knowledge also came from God and that it truly was appropriated by Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:22). This "law written on the heart" or "common grace" or "natural morality" may not have been particularly effective throughout human history, but neither has been the revealed law and ethics of Scripture, according to St. Paul (Romans 1-2).

The point is to maintain an open moral dialogue in an organization and encourage persons (whole persons) to speak up whenever something seems to them seriously wrong. Some may be sensitive to issues about which others are dull. People should be invited to speak personally, from their own core values and conscience. Of course, it may be that the organization will, in the end, have to thank the

person expressing the concern and then explain that their moral conviction cannot become the policy of the whole (diverse) organization. But it is all to the good to create an open and respectful environment in which people can share their deep convictions about right and wrong.

Golden Rule. The fourth test question moves from inner conviction to outward behavior: "Would you like it done to you and yours?" (Matthew 7:12). This is the Golden Rule of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, though it has close parallels in the Analects of Confucius and in other religious and philosophical teaching. Even Kant's "Categorical Imperative" is close to saying "Do unto others only what you could will everyone do to everyone."   Of course, what you personally, individually would tolerate is a part of this test question. But the rule was given to a group of disciples and it is best for us also to ask about our colleagues and loved ones. Would my colleagues and family tolerate this? Would I want them to? Would I myself, and my colleagues and children, take this new drug we are marketing? Drink the water we are polluting? Drive this car we are manufacturing? You can see that this fourth test goes further than question three's challenge to my conscience and thinking. Now it is about living, about action.

Publicity. The fifth test question is "Would it happen if it was publicized?" If this were on the front page of our newspaper or the lead story on the evening news, would it be happening? This test assumes that the larger society has some kind of moral compass and that our shame and fear before the judgment of our society will help us avoid unethical choices. Jesus once said that "Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." (John 3:19). Adam and Eve "hid from God" after disobeying him. Hiding and secrecy often accompany unethical acts; transparency and the light of day are great helps to keep things honest and ethical. This test is a little like the first (legal compliance) one. It anticipates that some kind of reliable moral guidance might reside in our society. Here, more than just the guidance enshrined in law, we are looking to public opinion to help guide us. Of course, we know that publics can be deceived and prone to evil. Just think of the well-educated German people who supported Hitler. So this publicity test is not adequate or fail safe by itself, but it is one more important screen for ethics.

Harm. The sixth and final test is "Could someone be seriously and irresponsibly harmed?" Many ethics codes repeat this "harm" guideline in one form or another. The ancient Hippocratic Oath of Physicians gives "do no harm" as one of the first obligations of medical practitioners. In my judgment, harm is the bottom line question in ethics. Will we be harmed or will we flourish? The Ten Commandments, for example, were explained and justified as being guidelines "for our good," that their observers' lives would "go well," and they would "live long in the land" (Deuteronomy 5-6).   Even the biblical teaching against the sins of the spirit (lust, greed, envy, etc.) emphasizes that these attitudes are wrong because they are the root of behaviors that harm others (as well as corrupting and harming those who harbor such attitudes).

Of course, "harm" must be debated and defined. Almost anything can potentially cause harm. The essential qualifiers here are "serious" and "irresponsible." These qualifiers are not always self-evident so a discussion must take place, hopefully including all who may be affected by the decisions ("the stakeholders"). People should not be exposed to harms they do not choose or should not have to choose.

All of these six ethics tests are helpful in detecting serious ethical issues. None of them is all-sufficient, all the time. Exceptional circumstances can occur. Interpretation is needed. Our character is tested. Some moral community is essential. But if we use these six tests and start getting either some intense red lights or a number of blinking yellows, we had better take the next step and strategize about what to do. Certainly each of these six tests has been proposed by non-religious thinkers so they are not "acts of faith" in any exclusive way. But as we have seen, Christian Scripture and tradition reinforce and emphasize these various themes in interesting ways.

Taking Broader View of Ethical Decision-Making

Before leaving the "recognition" phase, however, we should note also that, while dilemma resolution is extremely important, a range of other decisions is also ethically critical. First, our day-to-day, mundane practices and decisions shape the long-term ethical health and performance of the organization. It is not

just the big crises but the ordinary decision-making opportunities that are important. Second, our decisions regarding the mission and vision, the core values, and the ethical standards of our organization are more fundamental and significant than our decisions about what to do in a given dilemma. Third, our decisions about what kind of personal character we hire and what kind of corporate culture we build, have everything to do with our ethical health and performance.

We need to avoid a narrow "decisionist" approach and take a broader, deeper, richer standpoint toward organizational ethics. If we think of ethics and ethical decision-making *only* or *primarily* in the crisis/dilemma context, it becomes little more than "damage control"---a reactive, mostly negative, enterprise. We must move beyond this reactive "dilemma" ethics to a proactive "practice" ethics, from a negative, "boundary" ethics to a positive "mandate" ethics. To put the process in a nutshell, we must first clearly identify the core mission and purpose of the organization. Then we carefully map out the important "practices" of the organization (e.g., research, marketing, financial reporting, meeting, communicating, etc., i.e., the activities that carry out and achieve the mission). Next we identify the principles that should guide each particular practice area so that (a) no boundaries are crossed which will harm people and (b) positive mandates and ideals are held up to indicate "how we do the things we do" in each aspect of organizational activity. Obviously, this process has decision-making at every turn; but it is proactive, positive, mission-driven decision-making.

Strategizing About Ethical Dilemmas: What Do We Do Next?

If we find that our six test questions are leading us to consider an issue or dilemma as a genuine and (at least potentially) serious ethical challenge, the next phase is to strategize: what should I do about this problem I see? With whom should I share this information? What should my next steps be? What are the things I must be especially careful about as I move forward on this?   This is no time to be reckless. After all, if ethics is about protecting from harm, we do not want to react in a way that harms careers and companies and communities---including our own career and the well-being of those who depend on us.

Managers and organizational leaders can do a great favor to their company and its employees if they think about this strategy and create some guidelines and channels for response. Some companies specify that ethical questions and problems should (if possible) be brought immediately to the attention of one's supervisor, or to the compliance and law office, or the human resources, or to an anonymous ethics hotline. Some guarantee protection of anonymity. And some do nothing.

Christians may recall that Jesus suggested going to the offender first of all! If that doesn't satisfy, Jesus said, take another person with you. If that doesn't resolve the problem, then make it public ("to the church") (Matthew 18:15-17). Of course, in this instance Jesus was referring to interpersonal grievances more than breaches of organization standards but there is certainly a general biblical theme that one ought to speak *to* someone rather than *about* them behind their back, and that this is intended to lead to resolutions of problems before they become bigger and more destructive. There is also biblical teaching about the need for witnesses, especially in cases of accusations of leaders whose positions make them especially vulnerable to false accusations. The strategic implications may be that one should consult with at least one or two others before making anything public.

Analyzing Ethical Issues

In some organizations, the recognition and strategy phases may be all that is required. You recognize a problem and refer it to the ethics committee or ombudsperson or your boss and they take it from there. In other cases, though, you may need to proceed to the third stage and carefully analyze the problem. Four basic aspects of the problem need clarification and study before a resolution can be chosen.

First, clarify your own role and responsibility. Why are you pursuing this? What, if any, is your authority? You may be involved because it is a problem under your supervision. No controversy there. But what if, for example, you are pressing an issue of possible sexual or ethnic harassment outside your department or official responsibility? You may well be told to "butt out" and back off, that it is none of your business. On the other hand, you may feel as a human being, as a colleague, as a father, or whatever, that you

can't let it go until you are assured that everyone is protected from harm. The point is to know from where you speak, for it may be challenged.

Second, the analysis requires that we clarify the relevant facts of the case. What happened exactly? When? Where? Who was involved? Who were the players, what did they do, and who was affected? Document these facts. Get witnesses. Make sure you get this part straight. Some apparent ethical dilemmas actually disappear at this fact-gathering stage. What appeared to be wrong, or what appeared to be a forced choice between two terrible options, turns out to be untrue.

Third, clarify the decisive values and principles at stake and in conflict. These values and principles may come from the organization itself, from your profession, from your conscience, or somewhere else. What is at stake? Is it a question of honesty? Fairness? Safety? What are the central value issues? It is in terms of these values that you raise the issue . . . and it is in terms of these values that you will later justify your response (e.g., now it is fair, now it is safe, now we are being honest, etc.).

Fourth, and finally, clarify the action-options that are available---and their possible and probable consequences. No one can fully guarantee or know the consequences of our actions but that does not excuse us from being as careful as possible to think about what might happen if we do this or that.

In all four phases of the analysis, we must be very careful--a lot may ride on our analysis. We must also be creative and imaginative, think win-win rather than "zero sum." And we must be collaborative: there is strength and wisdom in numbers.

Looking at this analytical scheme from a Christian point of view, the four "clarification" exercises all can find precedent in the Bible and Christian tradition---as in common sense and business experience. Perhaps the most distinctive Christian contribution lies in the final comments concerning (a) the seriousness and care directed at this analysis, (b) a call for creativity and imagination---rooted, as it could be, in the Christian virtue of hope, and (c) the call for collaboration, working together rather than as ethical "lone rangers."

Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

The fourth phase is the goal of the whole process: finding the best possible resolution of the ethical dilemma. Following our careful analysis and best possible thinking we must choose the best, most responsible option we have come up with. How will we know our proposed resolution is the best we can do and is acceptable? We return to the earlier six test questions and to the core values and principles we clarified as being at stake in the dilemma. Our proposed resolution should be legal, in compliance with our ethics codes, respectful of our consciences, something we could live with ourselves with our friends, something we could defend in public, and something that does not serious or irresponsibly risk harm to others. The values that were in jeopardy (e.g., safety, honesty, fairness) are now observed.

Next? Drawing partly on the Jesus tradition, we could seek voluntary reform by the offenders---and blow the whistle only as a last resort. Unfortunately, too much ethical case discussion does not go further than the assignment of blame. A fuller resolution would require follow-through on those injured (employees, customers, whoever was harmed by the breech of ethics). We should also follow-through on the offenders---perhaps by helping them reform, perhaps by warning others they may harm.

Finally, a full resolution would mean carrying through with organizational, structural, and procedural reforms to minimize the chances of recurrence of this kind of ethical dilemma. Maybe the compensation system is actually rewarding unethical behavior. Maybe better management would lessen the temptation to get into trouble.

Conclusion

While the Bible does not use the terms "ethics" and "morality," it is a book full of ethical interest and guidance, and this has resulted in a rich tradition of moral theology and ethical guidance for the people. The biblical themes concerning the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and the "law written on the heart"---and many other texts--- make plain to Christians that they do not have a corner on moral wisdom. In fact, the first virtue of Christian moral character should be "poverty of spirit," i.e., humility---though the opposite is all too frequently the case.

Humble, open, teachable, respectful of the ethical convictions of others, Christians also have a particular ethical identity, centered on the values and ethics of Jesus, from which to speak. There is something valuable and insightful in the ethics of Jesus and Christian faith and tradition, even for the challenges in today's business milieu.

In summary, drawing on the business ethics literature and on the common sense experiences of business leaders in the workplace, and now drawing on the insights and emphases of biblical and Christian ethics, our decision-making approach includes the following:
- Emphasizing corporate mission as motivator and guide for ethical decision-making
- Valuing good character, not just reasoning skills, as essential to good decision-making
- Stressing teamwork and community rather than individualism in decision-making
- Respecting laws and codes of ethics but not viewing simple compliance as necessarily equivalent to ethical rightness
- Respecting the consciences and values of everyone in our diverse marketplace
- Utilizing the Golden Rule test in a community rather than individualist way
- Promoting transparency and social responsibility as part of the ethical process
- Viewing the threat or presence of serious harm as the bottom line issue in ethics
- Creating advance strategies (processes, training) for handling questions and crises
- Approaching offenders first, whenever possible; blowing the whistle only as a last resort
- Being careful in analyzing ethical issues---getting facts, values, and options clear
- Valuing imagination and creativity alongside logic and rationality in decision-making
- Empathizing with all stakeholders, especially to ensure that those with less power have a voice in decisions that affect them
- Not viewing a verdict assigning blame as the resolution of an ethical problem but following through on those injured as well as those guilty of the offense
- Following through with organizational reforms to minimize recurrence of the problem

Selected Bibliography

Ken Blanchard & M. O'Conner, Managing by Values (1997). *Building mission-driven, value-embedded cultures. Aligning values, practices, decisions.*
Marvin Brown, The Ethical Process *(3rd ed., 2003) Community/stakeholder ethical discernment.*
Jim Collins, Good to Great (2001). *Leadership with personal humility & professional will; "get right people in right seats on the bus."*
David W. Gill, Becoming Good: Building Moral Character (2000). *Christian character/community*
--------------------Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles (2004). *Christian principles/practices.*
Larry Johnson & Bob Phillips, Absolute Honesty (2003) *Building a culture of ethics & excellence*

[i] Woody Allen, *Side Effects* (New York: Ballentine, 1975), p. 76.
[ii] Warner Books, 2003.
[iii] Wiley, 3rd edition, 2004. Their "Eight Steps to Sound Ethical Decision-Making in Business" are provided on pp. 94-100.
[iv] Of course, if the pressure is on and one doesn't have the time to work through these four stages in any detailed way, the "one thing" to remember is to try to protect people from harm. Sometimes we have to keep it that simple.
[v] James C. Collins & Jerry I. Porras, *Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), chapter 4, "Preserve the Core/Stimulate Progress," pp. 80-90.
[vi] "The Ethical Roots of the Business System," *Harvard Business Review* (Nov-Dec 1983), p. 186.
[vii] Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; Exodus 20:1ff.; Matthew 5:1ff.; Luke 10:1; Matthew 18:19-20; I Corinthians 12:12ff.; Proverbs 11:14.