



Ethics and Values In Technology and Management

Prof - N.S.Ramaswamy*

Key Words: *Law of Nature, Technology, right & wrong, Bhagwad Geetha, Dharma, Management Education, Managers responsibilities, good & bad use of technology, degradation of environment, sustainable development*

Introduction

All areas of human endeavors – thoughts, and actions – involve specializations and relationships. The end-result of these endeavors depends on the level of knowledge, skills and technology. Over the years, we have learned to manage these activities to benefit everyone – the individual, family, society, the nation and the world. The world is made of opposites – right and wrong, good and bad, black and white, pleasure and pain, day and night. They are not opposites, they are complementary. One can't exist without the other. That is the Law of Nature. We have to understand this fact of life. Pleasure or pain, success or failure, winning or losing . . . it is all in our mind. External things may give us momentary, sensual pleasure. But they can't keep us happy forever. We should be aware of this limited nature of pleasure, based on our five senses. As Bhagavad-Gita says, our life

depends on our actions. If they are good, we will reap good results. If not, we will reap bad results. Our thoughts, words and actions make our life. If they are value-based, we will have a happy life. It is that simple.

We are born with certain attributes which, many believe, are the result of our actions in previous births. Those who had done good deeds in past lives, the belief goes, would be endowed with nobler mind, capable of good thoughts and action in this life and vice versa. Still several factors influence and condition us in this life, starting with parents, other family members, neighbors, teachers, friends, colleagues, co-workers, the music we listen to, the books we read, the rules we choose, the environment we live in, the list goes on. And, as we grow, we acquire the ability to discriminate between right and wrong.

* *Late Prof. Ramaswamy (1927-2012) is the founder Director of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and was a distinguished management Guru. He is a Padmabhushan Awardee. He is also former Patron of the Society of the Society For Professional Ethics and Management.*

Progress Without Values

Advancement of science and technology, the evolution of new management concepts, ideologies, corporations, governments and media – all contributed richly to this remarkable change in human behavior, attitude and material progress. Newer technology and management continue to take progress and prosperity to higher heights in all areas of specializations, transactions and relationships. During the last century, particularly, technology teamed with management helped to achieve spectacular achievements that were beyond the imagination of earlier generations. However, material progress brought along with it degeneration of values and degradation of the environment. Two billion people in advanced countries are affluent, but lead to mechanical, unhappy and stressed out life. At the other end, two billion people in poorer nations live in sub-human conditions. Two other billions living in developing countries are in between.

Anti-Nature

The degradation of the environment is much sadder. Air, water, soil and non-renewable energy – all great gifts from Mother Earth – are either being degraded or depleted. We are unimaginably cruel to animals too, mercilessly abusing and killing them for food, work and experimentation. Add to this the soaring rate of crime, violence, corruption, conflicts, confrontation, hatred and anger everywhere. We may conquer the space and discover the secrets of nature. But we don't seem to be able to manage our own affairs here on earth, flaky ethics and lax morals have weakened us. Technology is a

good example of this paradox: it has brought us superb modes of transportation and instant communication. It has added more comforts and convenience to our lives. The power to manipulate technologies and regulate the use of technology rests largely with the combined management team of politicians, bureaucrats, educationists, corporate, social and cultural elites, professionals and the media. This team, consisting of elected and non-elected officials, is ultimately responsible for all endeavors. This team can make or break our future, and decide whether to help or hurt Nature. Sadly, our socio-political-economic system is rooted in selfishness. Technology per se is neutral and without value. We, our actions, attribute value to technology. In other words, the above management component in the establishment determines whether to harm or help humans, animals and nature through misuse of technology.

Greed Guides

About 20% of our technologists are engaged in research, teaching and R & D (research and development); other 80% turn to techno-managing with varying degrees of management responsibilities. Higher techno-managers, naturally, have decisive say in making policies on products and services. The ultimate decision-making authority – be it to keep our employees and customers happy, or, to decide which technology to use – is with the management component of politicians, bureaucrats, media magnates and other professionals, whose sole guiding force of most is greed. I think it is time we took a closer look at the 'management component' of this decision-making team. How do we make this management component more

accountable to actions is the real issue. If we can keep the 'management' component rooted in ethics and morals in all its transactions and day-to-day relationships, we can achieve miracles and make our society more equitable, fair and accountable.

For reaching such heights on a continuous basis, we must also introduce adequate ethical component in technology and management education and practices. Incidentally, the principles and concepts of management do not contain universally accepted values. They are more guided by market pulls and material goals, such as the need to survive, grow, make profits, make name and fame and become powerful. Where is the time for principles and ethics in this pursuit for money and power?

What is Ethics?

Among other things, Ethics means "a concern for others." Others include not only mankind but all living beings including animals, plants and everything in nature, animate and inanimate and the total environment including the atmosphere. The principle – do not do to others what we would not like others to do unto us – is the basis of all ethical behaviors. To put this in practice, we have to understand and adhere to certain values of life. We live in a world advanced materially and intellectually. Knowledge has increased so exponentially that exact sciences are within the reach of human comprehensibility. Technology and medicine involve the application of this exact knowledge in various sciences. Management knowledge, too, is extending its horizons. Today's management strives to incorporate the empirical knowledge it gained from such fields as psychology and sociology. There is

an abundance of knowledge in the educational system today. Yet, there is a great black hole in human endeavors that threaten to destroy the very mankind. It is the lack of values and the creeping neglect of ethics in all walks of life that is leading mankind to suicide. Despite acquiring great proficiency in technology and advanced educational degrees, millions of people, who do not observe elements of ethics, live and behave as if they were illiterates. Shine and splendor outside, but darkness and despair within. This dichotomy is so glaring; it impedes social progress and peace.

Vedic Wisdom

In fact, India has a great deal to offer to the world in this front. It is high time that we share our ancient wisdom, the Vedic Knowledge, with our new generations, especially those enrolled in our technical and management institutions. As many of us know, the core element of our ancient wisdom is a firm adherence to a set of moral values and ethical behavior. The introduction of such values to our best young minds enrolled in our management and technical institutions is not just a fad, but a must for our survival as a nation, and indeed of all humanity. The time has come to acquire knowledge with character. We live in an age that anybody can acquire acknowledge. But unless it's guided by ethics and moral values, this knowledge can be abused. A misguided mind can not only blow up a campus but the entire world, if he or she has no character or good values. The same analogy can be applied to a corporate chief executive adamant on making short-term profits at any cost, ignoring the environment and destroying the habitats in his part of the world. The only difference is that the chief

executive is in a slow killing mode unlike the blow-up terrorist.

Knowledge Without Character

Those who do not practice ethical behavior and are devoid of moral values may succeed for a short while; even reach dizzy heights, but eventually fall all the more harder and with a bang. Several examples come to mind. A famous post-war Japanese Prime Minister, Takashita rose like a meteor in the political field because he was reputed to have the brain of a computer and the force of a bull dozer. When he had to resign following the exposure of corruption, his fall was all the more ignominious. Similarly the fall of the head of Enron, the multi-billion-dollar multinational based in the US. And so many others. In all their cases, training in ethics and values and correct values put in practice since childhood would have saved them. St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is often quoted, "If you speak with the combined eloquence of men and angels, if you have no Charity, you are like clashing cymbals." According to experts like Dr. Radhakrishnan, the word 'Charity' of Greek origin though has no exact English equivalent, can be translated exactly into the Sanskrit word Dharma, without which everything else is as nothing.

Upholding Dharma means following ethical values. Managers ought to follow ethical values. Some of these are discipline, decorum, punctuality, diligence, commitment, dedication, cooperation, etc. Those who are in that level of hierarchy, which requires them to follow order, should know when it is necessary to flout the orders from the top. In short it is not easy to uphold value systems and

to behave in an ethical manner. Today there are some firms even in India which inform all their employees about the value system, through a mission statement, which the firm is committed to uphold. On the whole it is easier for a value system to percolate from the top to the bottom rather than the other way around.

Management & Dharma

Coming to the field of management, it is in the inherent nature of the management function itself to introspect and decide whether a course of action or a decision is ethically and morally correct. In doubtful cases our educational system has to provide the tools by which the individual manager or technocrat for that matter can come to the right decision in compliance with moral and ethical considerations. This is the importance of providing a very sound education on ethics and moral values to the students, to prepare them to be wise and take ethical decisions and actions in life and professional career.

We use the word "ethics" in a general sense, applicable to all individuals, institutions, Corporations and organizations involved in innumerable human endeavor. Ethics means right conduct, righteous path, Dharma, moral codes, standards and norms of society. Obviously, an individual should be ethical in his thought, word, activities, transactions and relationships towards other entities in the world that include fellow humans, animals, nature, organizations, etc. In business, a corporation ought to be ethical in respect of customers, suppliers, government and environment. Individual ethics consist of honesty, integrity, truthfulness, fairness, etc. A religion also should be ethical in its relationship with other

religions, especially with regard to values such as tolerance, acceptance and mutual non-interference.

Conclusion

Many people believe that we cannot succeed in life if we strictly adhere to ethical and moral values in our actions and transactions and relationships. This is the result of our greed and corrupt practices. This can be changed by affirmative action, believing in truth. We and society would benefit on the whole if we observe ethical and moral values. We may not succeed in life in conventional sense by amassing wealth and undeserving name and fame, possession and privileges. But we would gain enormously by having peace of mind and happiness and also give happiness and peace to others. Destiny gives us good or bad beginning, but by determination and will

power we can partially offset the negative impact of past Karmas. By following Sanathana Dharma, observing Purusharthas and adhering to our Dharma we can bring in spirituality into life and be happy.

While we may not be able to achieve ideals, it is better to have ideals, and fail to achieve, rather than having no ideals at all. Ethical and moral values among the technologists and managers would bring about a better world for the individuals as well as for the society.

Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara, Vijayaae

Bhava.

Referance:

1. "Prof. N.S.R. – His thought, his ideas" - published by Indian Heritage Academy. www.heritage.cartman.co.in



**Ethical Communication is
Communication without causing
resentment,
Without hurting others' feelings
Without inciting violence."**