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Organizational Ethics

by [Steven Reece](#) - Wednesday, October 10, 2012, 01:13 PM

I believe that organizations can be (and should be ethical agents) primarily because organizations are comprised of people. Since people have the capacity to make ethical and unethical decisions, organizations have the same capacity to make decisions. Furthermore, leaders shape the ethics of the organizations that they lead either positively or negatively. As we see in the text (Johnson, 2012, pl. 318) Trevino, Brown and others make a distinction "between ethical leaders and those who are unethical, hypocritical or ethically neutral." The text (Johnson, 2012) states that, "The unethical leader falls short as both a moral person and a moral influence agent" (p. 318).

All organizations have ethical climates and may be categorized into one of five categories described by Victor and Cullen: instrumental (based on ego and selfish interests), caring (climates that emphasize "concern or care for others"), law and order (ethical climate that is characterized by code of conduct), rules (the ethical environment is governed by policy, rules and regulations), independence (people have broad ranging freedom "to make their own decisions"). Victor and Cullen point out that "the greatest to ethical performance" is "self-interest." This conclusion supports the fact that people can negatively impact the ethic of the organization that they lead by promoting their own self need and placing it ahead of the organization or those whom the organization serves.

Organizations have a "dark side" like people and can be uncivil (practice incivility), be aggressive in its actions towards the organization or others, sexually harass employees and practice discrimination in its hiring and career promoting practices.

I found the ethical climate building tools to be extremely helpful which has led to a change in one of my planned projects. As a non-profit organization we have "By Laws," vision and purpose statements; however we lack an ethical statement (code of ethics) regarding our organizational practices. So, based on my reading of Johnson (2012, pp. 334-344) I would like to produce core value statements regarding vision and purpose.

To date our organization has been operating on three core values derived primarily from Micah 6:8:

1. Remembering -- remember and honor the victims of the Holocaust by acting justly, dealing with the Holocaust/Shoah/Destruction today
2. Restoring -- bridging mercy through caring/charity through education and facilitating Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland
3. Reconciling -- serving with integrity, seeking to open a dialogue with the Polish Jewish community

The ethical core from which we operate is loving God and loving neighbor by serving the Jewish community through mobilizing resources to care for Jewish cemeteries -- "the house of the living," which is considered holy by the Polish Jewish community.

One of the reasons that I am pursuing the PhD is to better understand the nature of ethical leadership and to shape an organizational ethic that reflects the Jewish ethic, which is foundational to the Christian understanding

of what it means to love and care for the needs of others. In a sense this is our social responsibility as an organization founded by a group of Christians to speak to the injustice of the Holocaust today and thereby open a dialogue with the Jewish community of Polish descent.

My ethical approach for the organization that I lead has led to opportunities to be in dialogue with numerous Jewish organizations in the US and Poland and to be in dialogue with Jews living in North America, Australia, India, and Poland. I have been careful to let my yes be yes and my no be no. In other words, I have acted with integrity, which I have modeled and communicated to our board and those who partner with us and to those whom we serve. My commitment to act ethically has led to partnerships with the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City and partnering with several rabbis in our work. Understandably this is no small task, but I am learning and growing in how we approach our work ethically.

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