Does the Moral Case Work at Work?

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Presentation at
Ethics By Design Conference by EthicalSystems.Org
June 3, 2016
Thought Experiment

• If you want to persuade someone at your organization to do something “good” would you use a moral and/or business case?
When is it Appropriate to Talk About Morality?
When is it Appropriate to Talk About Morality?

What about at Work?
Moral Muteness

• **Managers** do not tend to talk about morality when trying to influence employees
  ~ Bird & Waters, 1989

• **Employees** do not tend to talk about morality when trying to influence management
  ~ Sonenshein, 2006
Research Puzzle

• Conventional wisdom suggests…

• But perhaps we have underestimated the role of…
Paper 1
The Business or Moral Case for Social “Good” in Organizations
Background

• Employees selling a social issue to management
  ~ Sustainability, poverty reduction, employee rights
• Asked employees about arguments used
• Asked managers about the effectiveness of the appeal
• Results from 5 studies
  ~ No effect for business case
  ~ Sometimes moral case has positive relationship
  ~ Moral case with fit with organization’s mission/values is most persuasive
Findings

![Graph showing the relationship between Moral Language and Issue Selling Effectiveness with Fit as a variable. The graph illustrates that Low Fit is associated with high Moral Language and low Issue Selling Effectiveness, while High Fit is associated with low Moral Language and high Issue Selling Effectiveness.](image)
Paper 2
The Business or Moral Case for Diversity
Facebook Fails To Improve Diversity Despite Rapid Hiring

Source: Tech Crunch, June 20, 2015
Why Do Organizations Value Diversity?

• Two main reasons
  – Business
    – A diverse workforce helps improve the companies’ bottom line
      » Getting top talent, increased creativity/innovation, entry into different markets, reputation, etc.
  – Moral
    – A diverse workforce is simply the morally right thing to do
      » Inclusion is an important principle, addressing prior and current societal discrimination, etc.
Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce, after cancelling all events in Indiana to support corporate boycotts of the “Religious Freedom Restoration” Act

“I deliberately sought to make a business case - not a moral case. I'm a CEO. I'm not a pastor or politician or a civil-rights leader.”

Source: Seattle Times, April 1, 2015
Moral Case Example

Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, 2013, responding to concerns over a decline in earnings when religious groups boycotted the company for supporting gay marriage:

“It is not an economic decision to me. The lens in which we are making that decision is through the lens of our people.”

Source: RYOT, April 2015
Background

- Influence of company’s diversity statement (why the company values diversity) on manager’s hiring decisions
- Measured or manipulated moral and business case
- Asked managers about hiring strategy
- Results from 3 studies
  - No direct effect for business case
  - Sometimes moral case has positive relationship
  - Business case works better with white males
  - Moral case works better with women and/or minorities
Findings

Hiring to Increase Diversity

- Moral Case
- Business Case

- White Male
- Female and/or Racial Minority
Practical Takeaways

• The business case is not as unequivocally persuasive as employees assume

• Do not be afraid to use a more authentic (moral) language—just be a little strategic

• Stripping moral language from work has serious downsides—look for opportunities to encourage moral talk
THANK YOU
FOR YOUR 7 MINUTES!

Questions?

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