

Conclusion

BY FOCUSING ON CERTAIN ASPECTS of modernity, I sought to call attention to the instrumental rationality that governs most of our decision making. The postmodern period has, in effect, fractured this technical rationality by reconsidering the norms, which has resulted in a return of ethics to the forefront. Because this study rests on data from managers, it seemed important to highlight certain theoretical aspects that, on a practical level, undergird theories of management and administration.

We also explored a concept of ethics that views it as a capacity to reflect on the norms that surround us. In the course of developing an ethics that favours autonomy and free will, I advanced a notion of leadership seen through the prism of ethics. Ideas about ethical leadership evolved at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s in the fields of school administration and general management. We embedded our notion of ethical leadership in the ethical decision-making process. In so doing, we called attention to the characteristics of an ethical process identified by researchers working in a variety of fields, from moral theories and philosophy to management and administration. In the light of these

considerations, we were able to validate the data we had collected concerning the ethical approach used by managers, mostly in the school sector. We then presented the TERA model, which aims to construct an ethical, responsible, and authentic trajectory at the level of reflection. This approach does not deliver a recipe but rather suggests frameworks within which ethical reflection can occur. The three ethics proposed—critique, justice, and care—articulate the principles that guide this process of reflection.

In light of my research on the impact of training on the ethical decision-making process, I would argue that awareness, or ethical sensitivity, is a determining factor in the adoption of an ethical approach. This sensibility manifests itself in varying degrees, whence the importance of an education in critical thought, so that we will not get caught up in strategies of management or influences that cloud our vision.

Exploring the factors involved in promoting an ethical culture brings us to the next stage in our analysis, one that is of great importance for the creation of an organization that is more human and more sensitive to actions that may be required. We must recognize that inappropriate conduct and the sometimes guilty decision to remain silent about reprehensible actions in the workplace causes ethical suffering. These produce a climate that actually encourages unethical behaviour. Added to this is attenuation of responsibilities, which serves to relieve people of accountability and which also hinders the establishment of an ethical culture.

The major issue raised by individuals seeking to foster an ethical process is the desire for some guarantee that their decisions will be considered *ethical*. By an ethical decision, they mean *an acceptable and just decision*. This issue remains open, and it calls for a response that rests on norms and values. According to Thomas Jones (1991), the notion of an ethical decision depends on social consensus and on the manner in which people decide whether actions are good or bad. To determine whether an action is good, one must initiate a discussion on the benchmarks we use to judge our guiding professional conduct and practices in relation to what we consider

acceptable in a given situation. What is considered acceptable can be defined from both within and without. When the definition comes from outside, we see the work of organizations, community groups, and others who assume responsibility for identifying business practices that place ethical norms at the forefront. It is when the definition comes from within, however, that we have an ethical culture. Policies regarding the management of human resources, the style of administration, and institutional modes of communication create a context that either is or is not conducive to an ethical culture. Among other things, decision making that takes place within a framework of well-defined responsibilities, the existence of clear criteria for evaluating employees, and the development of policies for employee recognition offer powerful incentives for the promotion of ethics in the workplace. Granted, ethical standards that rely on legal norms are more readily operational than those that depend on the articulation of values as well as much more demanding given the preliminary work of reflection that the legitimization of meaning in the workplace requires.

It goes without saying that ethical decision making is part of individual decision making. This fact, however, must not lead us to underestimate the collective dimension that sparks ethical reflection on values and norms that we use to define and justify our actions. The individual is not an isolated being but a social one, bound to others in relationships of reciprocity necessary for authentic ethical action.

This book reflects work in which I have been engaged since I began my doctoral dissertation. This work was intended to define, from within, the moral dimension that surrounds decisions made by people who strive to act properly with respect to their responsibilities and in situations that present them with ethical dilemmas. What was important was to get at the heart of ethical leadership, namely, decision making in a difficult context—a veritable ethical test in terms of the exercise of leadership.

A concrete ethical analysis proves to be a useful method for sensitizing people to considerations that must be kept in view in

order to make an enlightened decision. As most ethics researchers would agree, this awareness is the gateway to an analytical approach. Unfortunately, organizations do not often make use of this insight. Of course, the ethic that currently frames most of our relationships is not neutral but is rather embedded in a liberal vision of the market economy and of free choice, one aligned with a rather frantic course of action. Performance at any cost, heightened productivity without regard for the consequences, competition that drives individuals to consider others as enemies—these form the basis of many corporate cultures. Such a perspective has no use for ethical analysis. The fact that, these days, any approach that requires time for reflection is considered unprofitable has created a moral void. Nonetheless, to labour under this yoke is voluntary: it is in itself an ethical choice, one stamped with the seal of liberalism, utilitarianism, and cultural relativism. We return instead to a definition from Paul Ricoeur, namely, that ethics is an odyssey of freedom that lies between blind faith (I can) and an actual event (I do).

Philosopher Hannah Arendt declared that the twentieth century was witness to the banality of evil. Will the twenty-first century instead be marked by awareness and co-operation? We have already witnessed many examples of reconciliation, apology, and the redressing of wrongs. The Maher Arar case is one striking example. After allowing the United States to deport Arar to Syria, where he was tortured as a suspected terrorist, Canada recognized its mistake, presented its apology, and offered him compensation. The stunning and peaceful end to apartheid is another example. Will we see a reversal of other violations of human rights, acts of torture, and repression in our time? Is such ethical awareness not a first step towards increased human maturity?

Having dedicated this book to a very dear friend who passed away far too soon and whose contribution to moral development is beyond doubt, I would like to give him the last word. “The trademark of authentic morality,” William Hatcher wrote, “is that it genuinely seeks the moral autonomy and conscious self-motivation of every individual. Moreover, authentic morality affirms that every

human being has the capacity and potential to become morally autonomous. Finally, authentic morally asserts that the universal, multi-autonomous pursuit of authenticity will converge to produce a stable but dynamic configuration of society as a whole” (1998, 132).