

Corporate Machiavellianism and Macintyrian Capitalism: The Battle for the Soul of Business

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Abstract

The pursuit of profit and business success has always been the goal of CEOs and many business practitioners. This has further led to the devaluation of the human person in many business practices. This global economic system can best be described as the reinvention of the “Hobbesian Jungle” that is described as the state of ‘war of all against all’ (bellum omnium contra omnes), and a state of ‘man becoming wolf to man’ (homo lupus homini). The present economic arrangement bequeaths on us a state where man is involved in constant economic war of self-survival to the detriment of other peoples’ happiness and wellbeing. That the business world embodies its own morality different from other practices is the final conclusion of some ethicists. Therefore, this paper, with the use of appropriate secondary data, critically examines the fundamental strategy of the corporate world with particular attention placed on the recurrent battle between “Corporate Machiavellianists” and “MacIntyrian Capitalists”. Alasdair MacIntyre’s intellectual-moral intervention is worthy of critical assessment in any interpersonal relationship, the corporate world inclusive. Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of virtue forms the basis of interrogating unethical business practices generated from the loopholes in the capitalist economic system. This paper concludes by recommending the emergence of virtuous corporations or MacIntyrian capitalists.

Keywords: Corporate Machiavellianism, MacIntyrian capitalism; Virtue and Vice; ethics and Development

1. Introduction

It was Aristotle (1962, 1996) who first gave a copious analysis of the emergence of human society in which he argued that the human being is a social being and must of necessity exist in the community of other beings. He had a teleological conception of nature. According to him, all things in the world are to be understood in relation to the ends they aim to achieve.

In his famous book, *The Politics*, he presented five fundamental ideas:

1. The State is a natural community
2. The State is the highest community
3. Man’s end is to live the life of happiness
4. The State exists to help man live the life of happiness
5. In pursuing his goal of happiness man needs not just the State but his fellow men. In

Other words, man’s goal (happiness) is only realizable in the company of his fellow men.

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Aristotle's description of the human person is such that happiness is central to human existence. In view of man's realization of his unique end (happiness), business organizations emerged as a 'subsidiaries' of the State in promoting man's happiness and meeting the needs of man for which the State emerged to cater for. Aristotelian vision of the human person is thus of a being whose humanity must not be undermined in his daily transaction with the world. All men are thus free to pursue their own happiness, but such pursuit must not be to the detriment of the humanity of another man.

Just as the State emerged for the good of man, so also business organizations (either public or private) evolved as a 'subsidiaries' of the State for the good of man. In other words, business organizations emerged to cater for the needs of man. Albeit, the individual organizers of the force of production, in the process of pursuing their own happiness (economic benefits), are supposed to engage in transactions that will engender the happiness of man alone.

However, the growth of the human society, as it were, the development of capitalism as a profound human socio-economic construct, with elaborate freedom has widen the gap between "I" and "We". Capitalism preference for 'the self' as center of human interaction has further created the room for the pursuit of individual happiness at the expense of others.

Statement of Problem

The present human community globally has been swallowed by the force of capitalism which is often defined as an economic system where private actors are allowed to own and control the use of property in accord with their own interests, and where the invisible hand of the pricing mechanism coordinates supply and demand in markets in a way that is automatically in the best interests of society (Scott, 2006). Under the pretense of promoting the good of the whole society, the capitalists' primary consideration is the furtherance of their economic benefits which are mostly pursued sometimes to the detriments of other 'selves' in the same human community.

A further reflection on capitalism exposes and explains the inherent loopholes within this economic system which has been adequately explored by immoral business executives- both large scale and small scale business owners.

A market economy based on a broad participation of different forms of private ownership permits the achievement of the highest degree of effectiveness-among all economic systems known in practice-in using the material and spiritual resources of a society. As a result, it generates the quickest improvement in the living standard of citizens. This is because economizing costs, good organization of work, high quality of production, the effective search for new markets, and technical progress and development are in the interest of the proprietors who direct the work of enterprises (Gazeta, 1990).

The pursuit of profit and business success has become the goal of CEOs and many business practitioners. This has further led to the devaluation of the human person in many business practices. This global economy system can best be described as the reinvention of Hobbessian Jungle that is described as the state of 'war of all against all' (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), and a state of 'man becoming wolf to man' (*homo lupus homini*). The present economic arrangement bequeaths on us a state where man is involved in constant economic war of self-survival to the detriment of others' happiness and wellbeing. That the business world embodies its own morality different from other practices is the final conclusion of some ethicists. The problem becomes driving a trajectory between profit maximization and not using others as a stooge of economic benefits as the capitalist economic arrangement permits.

Aims and Objectives of this Research

Jackall (1988), in his book, *Moral Mazes*, depicts the business world as a conglomerate of people who are driven, primarily, by selfish interest (See Horvath, 1995). Indeed, our contemporary time witnesses the period where most business practitioners care-less about the consequences of their actions on their fellow human beings. Some business ethicists designate managers as self-centered and manipulative (Posner and Schmidt, 1984; Ralston, 1985) while others argue that they lack moral integrity (Kerr, 1988).

In the face of these claims, the central objectives of this paper are as follow:

1. To accentuate the importance of morality in business practices.
2. To present MacIntyre theory of virtue as a panacea to modern immoral business practices.
3. To emphasize the necessity of moral education to business practitioners.

2. Corporate Machiavellianism

Machiavelli advises that “one must know how to color one’s actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived. A prince...need not necessarily have all the good qualities...but he should certainly appear to have them” (Machiavelli, 1956 cited in Agbude, 2010: 286). This advice has been adopted and applied several times by entrepreneurs and investors to gather more money for themselves not minding the implication on the health and the lives of their customers.

Machiavelli posits further that “a prince...must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler....The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war; the first way to win a state is to be skilled in the art of war” (Machiavelli, 1956 cited in Agbude, 2010: 287).

The business world has been conducted as warfare ground where the survival of the fittest and the elimination of the unfit is almost the order of the day. Competition becomes intensified as several business owners of either complimentary or supplementary products see one another as enemies that must be eliminated. The warfare is not mostly among the competitors but also sometimes between the business enterprises and their customers. Sometimes, the battle line is drawn between the enterprises and the suppliers. Sometimes, the war is between the business owners and the host community.

Again, Machiavelli advises that the prince must never let his thought stray from military exercises, which he must pursue more vigorously in peace than in war. These exercises can be both physical and mental. A wise prince must observe these rules; he must never take things easy in times of peace, but rather use the latter assiduously, in order to be able to reap the profit in times of adversity (Machiavelli, 1956 cited in Agbude, 2010: 287). When adopted, this proposition encourages all forms of evil practices within the confine of the corporate world. Cruel and dangerous competitions, inhumane and sharp practices, corporate blackmailing, commercial propaganda, deceptions, fraud, production and provision of substandard products, and etc are hereby considered as integral part of the corporate world.

According to Machiavelli, there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second (Machiavelli, 1956 cited in Agbude, 2010).

In other words, the corporate prince (the entrepreneur) should adopt the approach of a beast in the business world.. A beast refers to instinctive, irrational, and aggressive personality. It refers to something unpleasant; something wild or unruly or unrestrained. Political leaders are to act as beasts. In other words, they are to act irrational, unruly, wild, unpleasant, and aggressive in order to retain their power (Agbude, 2010: 286-287). This proposal is a dangerous one for the corporate world.

Corporate Machiavellianism is the tendency to detach from considerations of ethics and perform actions that seek the benefits of self alone without recourse to the effects of such actions on others (Robinson and Shaver, 1973). Christie and Geis (1970) opine that high Machiavellians would outrightly take advantage of loose structures to exploit others. Schepers (2003) argues that if high Machiavellians are likely to take advantage of the range of understandings of exchange ethics in order to commit what might well be judged unethical activity, then it behooves society and corporations to train business people in exchange ethics, and to give such issues a permanent place in social and corporate dialogue. It is on the basis of this proposition that we propose the integration of virtue theory (especially as elaborated by MacIntyre) into the business

world in order to produce virtuous business practitioners whose goal is not just promoting personal wellbeing but the wellbeing of the community of humanity. A further justification of this study is that it seeks to improve on MacIntyre's theory of virtue by discussing the practical means/ways of training and empowering business practitioners to develop moral rectitude as a way of life.

As a matter of fact, the present business world has been characterized as Machiavellianism with the popular aphorism of 'the end justifies the means' (Hegarty and Sims, 1978, 1979; Singhapakdi, 1993). Machiavellianism is not against ethical behavior in business per se, but lives with the high possibility of indulging in unethical behavior especially when the actions are for the benefits of the self. It emphasizes the fact that the end of business practices is profit maximization; and business practitioners have the foremost responsibility to maximize profit either for the shareholders in the case of large corporations or for individual entrepreneurs. Just as Machiavelli advises the prince to learn the art of war even in the time of peace, Corporate Machiavellianism undertake this advice to the detriment of the well-beings of others.

...taking into account, he (the prince) will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practices them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity (Machiavelli, 1956).

Corporate Managers and individual entrepreneurs have incorporated this into their business concept resulting into what is today known as Corporate Machiavellianism.

3. MacIntyre and the Theory of Virtue

The concept of agon, (i.e, competition or contest) has dominated the business world to the detriment of others' wellbeing. The focus has become effectiveness which entails winning against all odds. Businesses focus on the achievements of external goods such as wealth, fame and power. However, the concept of the agon (a Greek word for contest or competition) is not negative in itself. But just that such contest must not undermine the community and the human persons that occupy it. For the moral person (a MacIntyrian capitalist, a competition provides him with the occasion of doing his best without necessarily undermining the humanity of others. It enhances the possibility to favourably contest to serve humanity through a virtuous engagement with business transaction that is customer-oriented. MacIntyre introduces excellence as against the ethics of mere effectiveness which focuses on successes, fame, wealth and power. The point is that excellence involves an internal standard which is socially approved and community oriented. According to Horvath:

While effectiveness defaults to that externally based perspective of winning, the ethic of excellence offers a fundamental alternative to winning. As MacIntyre uses the term, excellence involves an awareness of one's roles within society. Further, these roles constrain the individual to a basic integrity, accountability and justice: one must fill these roles well in order to benefit the society. Personal gain (winning) becomes secondary within such a group-centered focus. In this view, personal meaning (and reward) comes with the success of the group, not the self over others. This alternative is seen in the works of Aristotle (1962, 1996). Developing Aristotelian themes for the modern age, MacIntyre returns several times to the concept of roles. He sets the stage for Aristotle by going back to the age of the heroic society (Horvath, 1995).

The Virtue theory model has three components namely: community, roles, and virtues. The human community is the foundation of morality. Under this theorizing, there is group-centered paradigm which is at variance with the self-centered paradigm customary in ethical relativism which is the bane of the corporate world. Furthermore, the three stages in MacIntyre's discourse of virtue provide a ground against liberal individualism and Corporate Machiavellianism that characterized the present business world.

- **The First Stage: Practice**

In his book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre introduces practice as the first stage in the pursuit of ethics in organizing a society.

...I shall be using the word 'practice' in a specially defined way which does not completely agree with current ordinary usage,....

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre, 1984: 187).

For MacIntyre, chess, farming and football... are good examples of practices. In understanding what he meant by 'internal goods', his example of chess suffices. For him, two classes of goods are acquirable from the practice of chess. One who is skillful in playing chess may gain wealth, power and fame – these are the external goods one could acquire. In the same vein, there are internal goods such as skill, competitiveness and strategic imagination. These are only acquirable from the practice of chess playing. In the same vein, by engaging in the business world, one has the possibility of achieving the external goods such as wealth, power and fame.

More so, there are some goods which are related to chess. These internal goods are: analytic skill, competitiveness, and strategic imagination.

- **Practices Cum Virtues**

MacIntyre seems to be convinced that practice and virtue are inseparable in an organized human society. He therefore defines virtue as:

... an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods (MacIntyre, 1984: 191).

Having given this definition, for the first time in his book, MacIntyre went on to identify justice, courage and honesty as fundamentally important virtues without which practices could become immoral activities aimed at personal advancement without paying attention to the humanity of fellow human. This implies that these virtues are centrally important to fairly interact with other human beings within a practice either in the corporate world or the political world.

Thus, in the business world, justice demands that the business practitioners give to the stakeholders what they deserve. Justice demands that we pay our employees fairly. Honesty demands that we do not engage in selective emphasis in marketing and advertising.

- **Stage 2: The Narrative Unity of a Life**

MacIntyre argues that human actions can be explained within the confine of a narrative.

We identify a particular action only by invoking two kinds of context, implicitly if not explicitly. We place the agent's intentions, I have suggested, in causal and temporal order with reference to their role in his or her history; and we also place them with reference to their role in the history of the setting or settings to which they belong. In doing this, in determining what causal efficacy the agent's intentions had in one or more directions, and how his short-term intentions succeeded or failed to be constitutive of long-term intentions, we ourselves write a further part of these histories.

Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions (MacIntyre, 1984: 208).

According to MacIntyre, for any human action to be termed intelligible, it must be within the confine of a narrative. Thus, he proposes the 'narrative self' which he claims is antithetic to the 'emotive self' which promotes individualism as the determining factor in all human activities. MacIntyre argues thus:

But it is not just that different individuals live in different social circumstances; it is also that we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession;

I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. (MacIntyre, 1984: 220).

The individual self is an active member of the larger community thus must not be construed as an emotive self but rather as a narrative self who must act to the benefit of others who are within his/her narrative (history). Therefore, in the business world, the narrative life must replace the emotive life in order to give room for ethics of business (transaction) that will integrate the community of humanity. Instead of pursuing personal selfish interest, one begins to consider the existence of others within one's narratives.

- **Third Stage: Tradition**

The notion of tradition is the final and of great importance in MacIntyre's analysis of morality.

According to him:

A living tradition ... is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions ((MacIntyre, 1984: 222).

An individual is integrated within a narrative and part of a practice or practices; at the same time he is entrapped within some traditions. Tradition gives unity to the human life. Men are united by traditions. Man's quest for a good life is usually within the purview of traditions.

MacIntyre underscores the fact that liberal ideology is the major reason for the malaise of modernity. According to him, liberalism defines itself and isolates individuals as though they are not part of traditions. The business world and the entrepreneurs' engagement of this ideology turned the business world to the domain of personal pursuits of wealth to the detriment of the community and the stakeholders. Thus, for him, liberal individuals will not be able to display virtues since their formative orientation permit individualism; whereas the virtues give primacy to the community or group rather than selfish pursuit.

Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by 'the good' or 'a good' we mean that at which human beings characteristically aim....

Human beings, like the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific telos.... What then does the good for man turn out to be? Aristotle... gives it the name of eudaimonia- as so often there is a difficulty in translation: blessedness, happiness, prosperity. It is the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine....The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve eudaimonia and the lack of which will frustrate his movement towards the telos (MacIntyre, 1984:148).

One's purpose is connected to the role one holds in one's society. Just as it was in the old Greek city-states, everyone has a responsibility or to say, a role to play in the society. Whoever failed to perform his role in the old Greek city-states was referred to as idiot; which is the root of the English word – Idiot. All of us have specific roles to perform in our society.

Business managers and the individual entrepreneurs do not only have responsibilities to their corporations but also to the whole community at large. In other words, they have roles and responsibilities to both their organizations and their communities. In case where organizational role clashes with community role, the latter supersedes.

It is the virtue that enhances the capacity of the human person to pursue the eudaimonia (flourishing and wellbeing) of others alongside with oneself rather than solely pursuit of personal interest. This is the

dimension in which MacIntyre's reinvention of Aristotelian virtue becomes a necessity in contemporary business world in order to produce virtuous business organizations that are focused on serving rather warring against the eudaimonia (flourishing and wellbeing) of others.

4. Concluding Remarks

Since arising in the eighteenth century, capitalism has changed the face and chemistry of the earth. It has led to the emergence of great corporations and that of big and small business organizations which have built mountains of private wealth. Most of these organizations exist in the midst of controversial and unethical practices such as window dressing of their financial status to carry out fraudulent practices, CEOs' immoral and illegal acquisition of private properties, the use of shareholders money for personal benefit, corporate fraud, over concentration on profit as the major purpose of business practices. Given these negative factors, there is a need to address the operating system of capitalism that causes most CEOs and business practitioners to act not with the interest of enhancing the happiness of humanity but with goal of profit maximization for the shareholders and themselves which sometimes could exert negative effect on others.

The significance of this paper underscores the fact that if we want to change the effects of immoral business practices (organizational behavior), we have to upgrade its operating system.

Hardin (1968) proposed Statism and Privatism as the two authentic ways of saving the commons (the laborers or the poor) from the evils of capitalism and immoral business practices. For him, either a coercive (but legitimate) government would have to, through taxation, regulations and public ownership, stop capitalists immoral business practices which has resulted into the destruction of the planet, widening of the gap between the poor and rich and creating human unhappiness, or private property owners themselves stop the immoral business practices.

But we locate the 'messiahic' intervention in MacIntyre's proposal of theory of virtue as the necessary value in redressing immoral business practices. While the discourse on virtue is traceable to the ancient Philosophers, notably Plato and Aristotle, their forms of virtue are by no means the only ones. What virtue theory refers to, rather, is a collection of normative ethical philosophies that place an emphasis on being rather than doing. Put in another way, in virtue theory, morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual, rather than being a reflection of the actions (or consequences thereof) of the individual. Today, there is a great amount of debate among various adherents of virtue ethics about what specific virtues are morally praiseworthy. However, there is unanimous agreement that morality comes as a result of intrinsic virtues—this is the common link that unites the sometimes disparate normative philosophies into the field known as virtue ethics (The free encyclopedia Virtue ethics From Wikipedia). Alasdair MacIntyre seems to be convinced that the devaluation of the human person cannot be saved with the pontification and the legalism of both Utilitarianism and Deontology but rather a quick return to virtue theory as proposed by Aristotle.

While deontology places the emphasis on doing one's duty, which is established by some kind of moral imperative (in other words, the emphasis is on obedience to some higher moral absolute), consequentialism bases the morality of an action upon the consequences of the outcome (the free encyclopedia Virtue ethics From Wikipedia). The main contention with consequentialism is what outcome should/can be identified as objectively desirable. The Greatest Happiness Principle of John Stuart Mill is one of the most commonly adopted criteria. Mill (1859, 1861) asserts that our determinant of the desirability of an action is the net amount of happiness it brings, the number of people it brings it to, and the duration of the happiness (The free encyclopedia Virtue ethics From Wikipedia)

MacIntyre's theory of virtue concentrates on the development of moral agents; and if there is anything the business world urgently need, it is the development of moral corporate managers, business leaders and individual entrepreneurs. Thus, the relevance of this study becomes obvious in the face of current practices within the business world. In other words, corporate organizations should begin to emphasize the need to always behave morally to their employees given that this is not antithetical to good profit.

As against corporate Machiavellianism, we are calling for MacIntyrian capitalism given that it has proven impossible to destroy capitalism as an economy system. The implication of this call is that instead of becoming injurious to their customers and employees in their pursuit of profit maximization, corporate heads should embrace the concept of virtue as an imperative in their operations. They should become MacIntyrian capitalists – i.e. virtuous capitalists and their corporations, virtuous organization. This is an appeal to the moral consciousness of heads of corporations and their organizations to embrace more civil, virtuous and moral rectitude in expanding their business organizations. This is the whole essence of MacIntyrian capitalism. Business is a service to humanity and not warfare. To save the soul of business, our capitalists must embrace MacIntyre's virtue ethics as against corporate Machiavellianism.

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