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Book Review: Moral Reasoning at Work: Rethinking Ethics in Organisations

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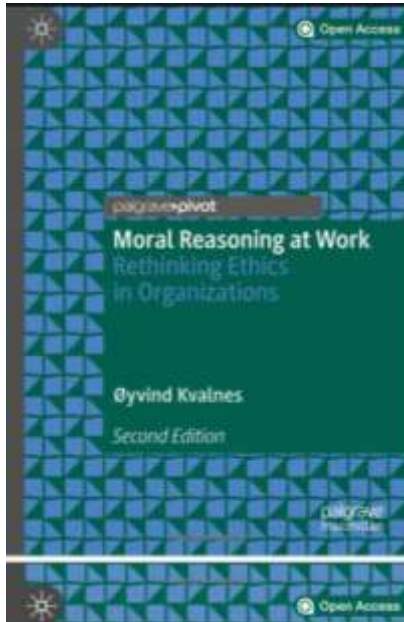
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Moral Reasoning at Work: Rethinking Ethics in Organisations (2nd ed) (2019)

Author: Kvalnes, Øyvind

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Organisational ethics is a cross-disciplinary study associated with a spectrum of disciplines such as business management, behaviour economics, moral philosophy, social psychology and criminology. As titled, the reviewed book, *Moral reasoning at work: Rethinking ethics in organisations*, aims at rethinking and restructuring ethics in enterprises, for which it addresses moral dilemmas in the workplace that not only affect formulation of codes of conduct and decision-making related to organisational effectiveness, but also directly impact individual career development and corporate competitiveness. It offers a comprehensive overview across 14 chapters regarding theories, assessment tools, examples (such as scandals in the oil industry, investment management, Cambridge Analytica, an Icelandic fishing company, and a Norwegian waste management company), and case studies (for instance, moral dilemmas in a material company, and a private bank).

In light of individual workplace ethics and corporate morals (including social responsibilities), the book discusses three assumptions: ethical challenges due to skill development, right decision making reliant on morally responsible persons, and positive impacts on organisational achievements. Particularly, this second edition adds new ethical challenges in this digital era: these comprise automation, the use of artificial intelligence to manage avoid-harm ethics and do-good ethics, and the utilisation of big data in and through social media. Involving various stakeholders, these challenges rise across intra-organisational (operational issues, employer-employee relationship) and inter-organisational (staff-competitor relationship, inter-company relationship) contexts.

This book presents fundamental theories of ethics such as utilitarianism, which supports the view that outcomes (the good) are more important than conduct (the right); duty ethics, representing the opposite view from utilitarianism; moral dissonance, elaborating on conflicts between the decision-maker's moral beliefs and convictions; and moral

neutralisation, which releases an individual from moral dissonance. It also illustrates how theories can apply to daily life; examples include abortion for a pregnant woman with a serious illness and unemployment due to an organisational restructure. The Doctrine of Double Effect allows for harm if the outcome does not come from an agent and with a foreseen consequence. The Principle of Equality provides five criteria considering gift acceptance from domains of intention (purpose of action), roles (giver and recipient), timing, value (amount of the gift), and culture. The Golden Rule guides inter-personal behaviour through means of mutual care. The Principle of Publicity encourages decisions that align with public scrutiny.

The author analyses a Navigation Wheel, an evaluation tool for ethical decision-making, from six dimensions. *Law* concerns legal issues; *identity* complies with values; *morality* considers right actions; *reputation* avoids negative impacts on goodwill; *economy* fits business objectives; and *ethics* retains justification for decisions. Such a model is also valid for individual concerns within a business environment.

The book may also open up more areas of thought. First, it reveals an ethical awareness of strategic formulation and daily operation within entities, for which ethics training is significant; especially for human service professionals such as healthcare practitioners, accountants, lawyers, social workers and financial advisors who may encounter conflicts of interest with clients that likely to induce criminal penalties. If it could have elaborated on such training more structurally and systematically, this would have enhanced its role of guidance. Second, the book presents limited discussion on referral ethics, in how it intertwines with professionals, clients and intra-field colleagues. This topic becomes noticeable in various professional bodies; therefore, it should be specified cautiously so as to minimise moral dilemmas, moral blindness and moral muteness. Third, culture reflects moral beliefs and standards of a specified territory. Local values influence business; in particular, joint ventures, acquisition and mergers in globalisation. This review suggests some debate on such discordance and on the importance of culture on ethics, which may enable practitioners to equip themselves better for international business. Fourth, diversity in the workplace marks acceptance and harmony for vulnerable groups; for example, sexual minorities, as well as those with physical and psychological disabilities. The book should have paid attention to this issue. Fifth, responsible companies become responsible for climate change and environmental protection, for which relevant policies should comprise core corporate programmes. The book could have delved into such a worldwide theme. Lastly, this review proposes that a mechanism through which theories and practices are adopted to produce a model and show ethics in the contemporary workplace in a constructive manner could have been presented as a conclusion.

The book offers insights into the academic and practical principles needed to identify real and false dilemmas that occur within organisations, despite a need of improved discourses on social environment and events that affect corporate leadership related to organisational ethics. In short, it serves as a reference not only for employers, employees and organisational leaders in various business sectors to stipulate required and expected behaviour and diminish ambiguities in work settings, but also for business consultants, researchers, students and scholars who are interested in further exploration.

About the Reviewer



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Fung Kei Cheng, PhD, focuses on applying Buddhist and Chinese cultural theories to a variety of disciplines, including counselling and psychotherapy, mental health, public health, complementary and alternative medicine, conflict resolution, management, gender studies, cultural studies, and sustainable development.

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