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Ethical Reading Webinar

Conflicting values in the workplace

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Ethical Reading

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What is Ethical Reading?

- ❖ Ethical Reading is a new not-for-profit social enterprise
- ❖ Our mission is to help embed ethics into the way we live and work in Reading.
- ❖ **We want to Inspire, Educate & Collaborate**
- ❖ We have 36 Partners and Supporter organisations and approaching 2,000 individual members/followers
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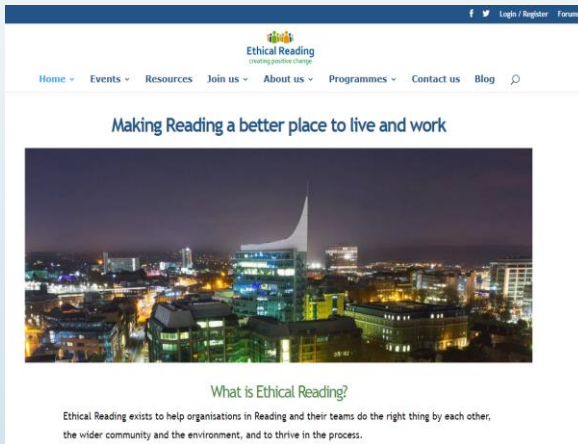


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What we do



LUNCHtime WEBINARS



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Charlotte Newey

- ▶ I'm a lecturer at the University of Reading
- ▶ My lectures cover practical ethics, ethical theory and political philosophy
- ▶ My research interests are currently focused on questions about fairness, poverty alleviation, and the fair distribution of healthcare resources.
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Today's webinar:

1. Moral values
2. Different kinds of conflict
3. Two case studies
4. The unusual nature of moral conflicts
5. Some practical suggestions



Moral values

- Today's focus is *moral value*.
- 'Being moral' isn't the same as 'obeying the laws of the land', even though there's frequent overlap.
- Example 1: Cheating on your spouse.
- Why do we care?



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Moral values

- ▶ Common claim: “morality just depends upon the culture you grew up in”
- ▶ I don’t think this is true
- ▶ However...
- ▶ The fact that people think like this might make disputes harder to resolve. I’ll return to this point.



Moral values

- Moral values are tightly connected to how we ought to treat each other.
- We're concerned about respect, fairness, impartiality, kindness, equality, justice and freedom.
- Two popular moral views:
 1. The right thing to do is whatever will bring about the best consequences.
 2. We should follow a set of common sense rules: don't lie and cheat, don't be mean or harm people, do be kind and loyal, keep your promises. Take care of your family. Treat others as you'd like to be treated. Don't use people.



Conflicts and resolutions

- ▶ Different forms of conflicts or disagreement.
 1. Non-moral conflicts related to your work environment.
 1. Factual.
 2. Non-moral values or ethos (we'll look at an example)
 2. Moral conflicts related to your work-environment (our main focus)



Case Study 1. Non-moral

- The directors of Company A have different views about the direction the company should take: Director 1 wants to consolidate. Director 2 wants to expand. What are the steps towards resolution?
- Facts about the company now
- Market research
- Expert advice
- What do other directors and shareholders think?
- Ultimately: where does the buck stop?



Case Study 2. Moral

- Global Corp would cut its tax bill substantially by using legitimate tax havens and offshore financial centres. Director 1 endorses this strategy. Director 2 understands that tax havens have contributed to revenue losses for developing countries of at least US\$50 billion a year and wants to include this consideration into the decision making process.
- Agreement about non-moral facts: Developing countries would receive more revenue if corporations didn't employ (legal) tax avoidance strategies. Both agree Global Corp would pay more tax and be less competitive without such schemes.
- There *is* moral conflict. D1's views: Global poverty isn't Global Corp's problem. GC has a duty to shareholders. D2's views: The additional revenue could save or enhance thousands of lives. Businesses have moral obligations.
- Discussions get heated as D1 and D2 argue for their positions.



What's going on?

- Moral conflicts often have an unusual feel to them. They can feel deeply personal. It is easy for emotions to get in the way. Both parties may feel "judged" for the views they hold.
- Unlike the non-moral case, there's no fixed hierarchy of expertise to appeal to. The MD may have a stronger or weaker moral compass than the Graduate Trainee.
- Moral rules such as "maximise the best consequences" or "don't lie, cheat or harm people" are hard to apply in complex situations.
- Importantly, conflict can arise not only because of the moral values we hold but also because of our beliefs about moral values.



Beliefs about morality

- ▶ If either or both parties believe that morality is "just relative" will they bother with the other person's views?
- ▶ I think there's good reason to believe that morality is more than the sum of our subjective beliefs.
- ▶ If someone said that kicking friendly dogs for fun, lying and cheating are all morally acceptable, wouldn't we think their moral compass is broken?
- ▶ We have good reasons to take moral conflicts—and each other's perspectives—seriously.



Practical suggestions

1. It helps to understand whether the dispute is moral or non-moral.
 - ▶ Are you in conflict because of special, unusual circumstances?
 - ▶ Do you agree about the non-moral facts?
2. It also helps to find out what informs the other person's moral values.
 - ▶ Are they focusing on outcomes and harms or on certain rules that shouldn't be broken?
 - ▶ What's at stake for each of you?



Practical suggestions

3. Can you use any modes of resolution that you'd use for non-moral conflicts?
 - How would you feel if someone up the line takes the opposite view to you but says "the responsibility is all mine?" (or are you the person to do this?)
 - Do you have people in your organisation with ethical expertise and responsibility?
 - Is there any room for compromise?



Taking stock and conclusion

- We've identified moral values.
- We've seen that conflicts can take different forms.
- Today's focus was on conflicts that seem to stem from holding different moral values and which occur in the workplace.
- We've noted that moral conflicts can be emotionally costly.
- Finally, we've identified questions to ask to identify why the conflict has arisen and some practical suggestions for making progress.



Take home messages

- Understand that moral disputes are frequently emotive and sometimes intractable.
- If you have the final say, acknowledge the other parties' views and reasons, take these into account in the decision facing you. Offer a justification for whatever choice you make.
- If you don't have the final say, consider asking the person who does to explain their reasons to you and to acknowledge your own. You may not agree but perhaps you'll influence future choices.



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