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Quality is to a product what character is to a man - is virtue ethics the missing piece in quality management?

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Abstract

Background

It is a growing trend within the field of management studies to argue that virtue ethics is necessary for good management. This quite recent trend goes against the common view of ethics in business as fundamentally deontological or consequentialist, rather than a focus on character. Business ethics in general, including project management, is often reactive rather than affirmative. In other words, to avoid problems and scandals, managers and employees use rule-based ethics that prohibits infraction and wrongdoing instead of becoming role models that strive for the good. Quality is seldom discussed in relation to virtue ethics. In this paper, we argue that virtue ethics should also be a fundamental part in quality management by bringing quality down to the personal level which has a processual focus (continuous improvements, and commitment), and thereby fits well into for example Total Quality Management. We stay true to the Heineke statement that character is to a man, or woman, what quality is to a product, or process.

Purpose

To to argue for the use virtue ethics in quality management.

Methodology

We have emulated the methods employed by Loo using a general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. Responses on three ethical dilemmas were collected between 2011 and 2015. These include 88 responses from Project management students and 31 responses from well-established PMs. The respondents were asked to give their solution to the dilemmas, and also give their solution if they had the dilemma themselves as a PM. All the response will serve as the basis for the analysis in this paper.

Findings

TQM and ethics have in common that an integral perspective is needed in order to achieve the intended goals and quality management can benefit from a more direct engagement with theories of virtue ethics. Organizations have to find out what kind of behaviors (virtues) is necessary for quality improvements and what kind of character is best for co-worker working with quality issues. Virtue ethics, as maximalistic ethics, is not enough, but must be complemented with a minimalistic ethics to promote quality

Paper type

Research paper

Keywords

Keywords: Ethics, Project Management, Quality Management, Virtues.

Introduction

There is a growing pressure on organizations in general to be more efficient, successful, and strive for good quality in all processes. At the same time the ethical issues in the public debate have gained momentum as corroborated by the increasing number of scandals involving organizations whose staff has behaved unethically (Philipson, 2004). In this paper, we explore the connection between good quality and good ethics. The particular strand of ethics on which we draw is virtue ethics, a subset of ethics, the proponents of which argue that people with good character will be able to identify moral dilemmas and also find the best way to resolve them so it will benefit the most people (Bertland, 2009). Virtue ethics is distinguished from consequentialist and deontological ethics in its focus on character rather than action (Andersson & Lennerfors, 2011). That there is potentially a connection between virtue ethics concerned with character and quality is shown in the words of Heinz, a businessman that in the late 19th century asserted that “Quality is to a product what a character is to a man” (H. J. Heinz Company, 2012).

It is a growing trend within the field of management studies to argue that virtue ethics is necessary for good management, including the sub-field we are concerned with in this paper, namely project management. This quite recent trend goes against the common view of ethics in business as fundamentally deontological, or dealing with a number of duties, or consequentialist, dealing with consequences of a particular action, rather than a focus on character. Business ethics in general, including project management, is often reactive rather than affirmative (Lennerfors, 2013). In other words, to avoid problems and scandals, managers and employees use rule-based ethics that prohibits infraction and wrongdoing instead of becoming role models that strive for the good (Philipson, 2004).

In this paper, we argue that virtue ethics - apart from being a central theory within ethics in business - should also be a fundamental part in quality management. We stay true to the Heinzian statement that character is to a man, or woman, what quality is to a product, or process. To make the argument, we explore theories of quality management and show that some authors are including ethics into theories of quality management. We then review the discussion about ethics in the sub-field project management and show how very few scholars draw on virtue ethics. In contrast, in our empirical study we show that virtues are indeed prevalent in the respondents' statements about ethics. However, quality is seldom discussed in relation to virtue ethics in the respondents' statements. In the discussion we explore how virtue ethics, which is widespread in practice, could contribute to quality management, by bringing quality down to the personal level, and combining it with virtue ethics, which has a processual focus, is about continuous improvements, and commitment, and thereby fits well into for example Total Quality Management.

Theoretical frame

As the purpose of this paper is to argue for the use virtue ethics in quality management, it is important to give an account of the theories dealing with quality, virtue ethics, and ethics in business (in our study operationalized as ethics in project management).

Ethics in Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) has been used for decades in large part of the world to improve competitiveness, efficiency and profitability (Klefsjö, Bergqvist & Garvare, 2008). One definition of TQM is;

“...a corporate culture characterized by increased customer satisfaction through continuous improvement, in which all employees in the firm actively participate” (Andersson, Eriksson & Torstensson, 2006:284)

TQM and ethics have in common that an integral perspective is needed in order to achieve the intended goals (Julliard, 2004). TQM is structured to the three levels Total, Quality and Management. *Total* refers to the fact that all activities of a company are included in the optimization process, i.e. procedures, co-workers, management activity, suppliers and customers. The *Quality* aspect refers to the objective of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the company. The aim of the *quality* part of TQM is to establish a structure in which all persons involved in the process do their job in the best possible way. The component *management* aims at bringing the entire company in line with customer expectations (Julliard, 2004). TQM is a method focusing on the optimization of processes – products or service and basis on five (5) values (Figure 2) led by committed managers. Based on top management commitment, successful work with quality improvements can be built. In quality work there is a continuous process which develops products as well as the personal who are involved in these processes (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). This can be seen as there is a social dimension in every process (Julliard, 2004).

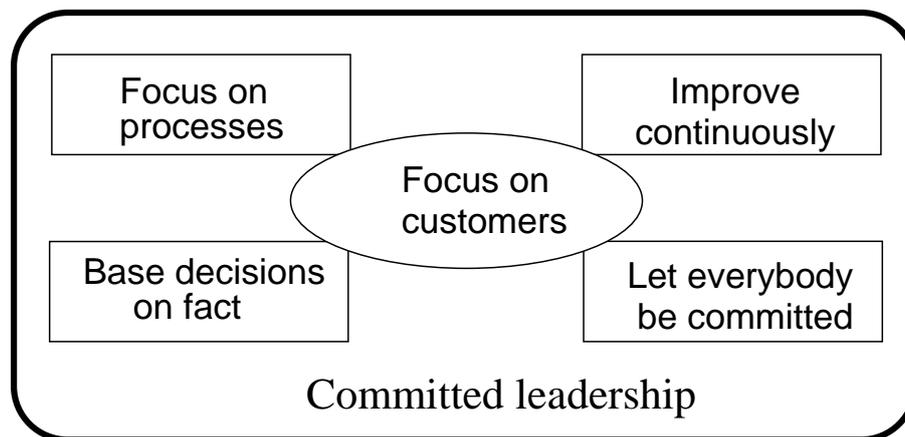


Figure 2: The Cornerstone Model, which defines the core values of TQM (Bergman & Klefsjö 2003:36).

The core value *let everybody be committed* stands for facilitating the opportunities for employees to be involved, participate in decision-making and in different improvements – given individuals a chance to do a good job but also that they have to take responsibility (Bergman & Klefsjö 2003). Julliard (2004) states that to work with the cornerstone model in an organization need the employee to be involved in ethical decisions. At the moment the ethical questions in organizations are reduced to the question if it is not wrong to society (Julliard, 2004). However, TQM has not always lived up to initial expectations and the promises of success have far from always been obtained. Studies show alleged failures, implementation problems and lower results than expected (Andersson, et al., 2006; Klefsjö et al., 2008; Wicks, 2001). TQM is not a theory handling issues about ethics or morality (Wicks, 2001) and many problems related to implementation of TQM seem to depend on ignorance of psychological and behavioral difficulties in organizations (Klefsjö et al., 2008). The ethical quality management (EQM) concept aims to enlarge the scope of TQM and involve the social implications in an organization. The main idea of EQM is to find ethical

frameworks and committing all members of the company to this set of ethics, discuss them and make them as a natural part in decision-making (Julliard, 2004).

We strongly believe that EQM is a good way to proceed towards appreciating ethical issues within quality management. But our central point is that EQM can benefit from incorporating virtue ethics. By having managers and employees who constantly strive to develop their character, there will probably be a better fit between the expectations of the society and the company's perception of quality, and there will be a motivational component in the development of character which will promote the long-term strive for good quality.

Before discussing virtue ethics, we will give a brief overview of the state of the art in project management ethics.

Project Management and ethics

For about sixty years organizations have been using projects to fulfill their strategic objectives (Bredillet et al., 2014; Crevani & Lennerfors, 2009). To help the project manager (PM) to be successful there is extensive literature (Loo, 2001) earlier often with a focus to identify new and better ways for be successful in the three primary objectives; to meet specified goals within cost and on time (Helgadóttir, 2008) even if some of them mentions ethics (Loo, 2001). Nowadays the literature has a broader focus to the importance of being able to skillfully manage people and also to ethical issues (Helgadóttir, 2008). To help the managers there are also standards and related professional certification systems, based on best practice, established in different institutes like International Project Management Association (IPMA), the Project Management Institute (PMI), and The Global Alliance for Project Management standards (GAPPS) (Bredillet et al., 2014). Since more than 15 years there has also exist an ethical code for PM -The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct which describes the expectations the PMs have and their fellow practitioners in the global project management community (PMI, 2006).

“The purpose of this Code is to instill confidence in the project management profession and to help an individual become a better practitioner, by establishing a profession-wide understanding of appropriate behavior” (PMI, 2006).

This code addresses general professional and personal conduct in a broad context, and do not capture the complexities of PM ethics. Bredillet et al. (2014) are inspired, similarly to Crevani and Lennerfors (2009), by virtue ethics in their discussion about what it means to be a competent PM. Their definition of a competent PM is the one who: “possesses some attributes to fulfill her/his role; and will demonstrate a certain level of performance” (Bredillet et al., 2014:225). The attributes and performance standards are defined from IPMA, GAPPS and IPM. Even if these standards are established and used study's shows a gap between expected and actual performance of PMs, and mention the role of individual characteristics (personality, abilities, motivation) as well as technical skills and skills in human relations (Bredillet et al., 2014; Ramazani & Jargeas, 2014). What Bredillet et al. (2014) point out is that the personal dimension is basically lacking from discussions about project management ethics. By further drawing on the tradition of virtue ethics, the importance of character can show through even more than in the state-of-the-art theories of project management ethics.

Virtue ethics

What is missing from much of professional ethics, such as project management ethics, is the *personal* dimension in ethics. A very influential proponent of virtue ethics within business

ethics is Robert Solomon, and he argues that more self-awareness of ones part in the organization with a keen sense of the virtues and values of that world is important (Solomon, 1992). To follow a code of conduct is not enough.

Virtue ethics stresses the importance of developing *good habits of character*. As has been stated, it focuses on the agent rather than the actions performed by the agent. It is generally held that good actions stem from a good character. Good actions, on the contrary, build good character. There are bad counterparts to virtues called vices. Good ethics, from the point of view of virtue ethics is to practice the virtues and avoid the vices. Probably the first Western formulation of virtue ethics stems from Plato arguing that there were four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Aristotle developed Plato's virtue ethics, and today, most of virtue ethics ultimately stem from the ideas of Aristotle, developed to suit the modern condition. By practicing virtues, Aristotle held that we would reach a state called eudaimonia, human flourishing. There were in Aristotle's theory moral virtues and intellectual virtues, and a particularly important virtue was phronesis, or practical wisdom. Aristotle lists virtues such as courage, temperance, generosity, friendliness, and magnanimity. While there is significant discussion about what virtues are of importance in today's society, we principally draw on the idea that virtue ethics is about building character, by practicing virtues and avoiding vices, in order to reach a state of human flourishing (Andersson & Lennerfors, 2011).

To understand how virtue ethics differ from the standard approach to professional/business/project management ethics, we draw inspiration from a Swedish business ethicist, name Philipson (2004). We argue that one can tackle professional/business ethics in two radically different ways, both of which are necessary: The first form is about; "Ethics can be a rubric on a way to avoid doing wrong, in other words not to act incorrectly" – that is *minimalistic ethic* (Philipson, 2004:88). It is about doing (or not doing) acts because you have to, it is a duty our obligation. In an organization it is necessary to construct a minimalistic ethic – a set of particular obligations, to assume a prima facie loyalty (Solomon, 1992). If not the employees are doubtful about what is correct acting or what is not. Organizations need the minimalistic ethics to: avoid problems/scandals, liberate creativity and make job satisfaction (Philipson, 2004). The other form is *maximalistic ethic* (Philipson, 2004) which is more an affirmative ethic where the actors become role models rather than just doing their duty. These acts cannot be forced by the organization, like the minimalistic ones. Maximalistic ethic is a set of ideal/values that shows the right way, like guiding stars. In this view, the human being wants to do good actions. Organizations need the maximalistic ethics to; create a vision/set goal, motivate leaders/co-workers, promote the joy of work and increase the organization's credibility (Philipson, 2004).

It is within the maximalistic ethics that we can understand the role of virtue ethics. Excellence in organizations comes from understanding what special role one plays and by one's ability by understanding the role – to build a good character. Virtue ethics has always held that a manager with good character will be able to identify moral dilemmas and also find the best way to resolve them so it will benefit the most people (Bertland, 2009).

In an empirical illustration we will now show the importance of virtue ethics within project management. The empirical study is a replication of a paper written by Loo (2001), who collected responses to three ethical dilemmas with a quantitative survey addressed university studies in project management. But Loo's (2001) study lacks any connection to virtue ethics. Also, his study is quantitative and ours is qualitative. In this paper we emulate Loo's (2001)

study in a qualitative fashion by letting project management students and project managers respond to exactly the same vignettes with concepts rather than numbers.

Methodology

Although several researchers have investigated the role of ethics in project management, Loo's contribution (2001) remains a seminal paper in this field. For our purpose, we decided to emulate the methods employed by Loo (2001) using a general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data (Thomas, 2006). Responses on three ethical dilemmas were collected between 2011 and 2015. These include 88 responses from Project management students (collected in 2011) and 31 responses from well-established PMs. The respondents were asked to give their solution to the dilemmas, and also give their solution if they had the dilemma themselves as a PM. The students' responses were answered and collected in class. All of the students in class wanted to participate. All PMs answers were provided via email. The sample of them consisted of 8 project managers conveniently selected from the authors' network and 23 were found by asking managers of project offices and managers of organizations who work with projects if their organization wants to participate. All the responses will serve as the basis for the analysis in this paper.

The ethical dilemmas were:

Ethical dilemma A

“During the planning phase for a multi-year project, a PM identified a highly-qualified senior systems analyst and prepared to make an attractive job offer for this senior position. However, the HR Department intervened stating that the candidate was not a member of one of the company's targeted groups under their employment equity program. The PM was instructed to hire a systems analyst who fell into one of the targeted groups. The PM again reviewed all the job applications and identified only two applicants who were members of the company's targeted groups for employment. One applicant had just graduated from university and had no work experience for this senior position while the other applicant had almost 10 years of relevant experience but mediocre performance ratings and references. The project manager approached the HR Department stating that neither of these applicants was qualified for the job and that the original candidate should be offered the position. To the manager's dismay, the HR Department insisted that one of the two applicants from the targeted groups be offered the position and receive the same attractive offer that was proposed for the original candidate. The PM reluctantly complied and made the attractive offer to one of the other applicants, who gladly accepted.”

Ethical dilemma B

“About half-way through a major project, a PM becomes anxious about the schedule because the project has been falling behind schedule for some time and a formal project review with the client is set for four weeks from today. The PM discusses the situation with several senior members of the project team and there is much heated discussion. At the end of the meeting, the manager decides not to mention the schedule problem to the client or to senior management in the hope that the project might get back on schedule by the time the project review is held in four weeks.”

Ethical dilemma C

“The manager of a large international project has just completed the final presentation to the client and signed-off the contract for the final payment. Both groups, the project team and the group from the client's company head to the dining room for a formal luncheon celebrating

the successful project completion. After an enjoyable lunch, the client takes the PM aside for a few private words. The PM is disturbed to hear the client allude to an expectation for a “cash gift” for having “facilitated” this project and allude to some future contract possibility too if they continue with such a good relationship. The PM tactfully avoids responding by saying that another appointment is pressing and that they could get together again in a couple of days. The next day, the PM phones the Vice President at the home office to discuss this situation because it sounds like a demand for a kick back. Surprisingly, the VP doesn’t want to get involved and cuts the conversation short by telling the project manager that this is an important client and to ‘handle it’. The PM then phones the client to arrange to meet for lunch the next day in order to hand over several thousand dollars in cash from the balance in the project account.”

We attempted a replicate of Loo's (2001) study into a qualitative study with concepts. As all answers were written there was no need of transcription. The answers provided were read several times by the main author, who coded strings of text with codes. These codes were aggregated afterwards into categories.

Findings

After reading and translating the responds of the *students*’ dictums we find:

Ethical dilemma/vignette A:

Of the 88 responders’, 66 of them (75%) thought the Project Manager (PM) did the wrong thing. All of them described some kind of will to fight more for the right thing to do.

“The PM should have asserted themselves more and hired on of the ones he wanted for the job. It is the PM who is leading the project and should probably hire the personnel he thought is the most adequate.”

13 students (15%) wrote that they had done the same as the PM, because he did the right thing to do after the circumstances.

“I think the PM did the right choice to *try* to employ the person he thought was the right one for the job”

Nine students did not say anything about if the PM handling right or wrong and 22 dictums (25%) where described like there are “rules/policies/orders/directives that I have to follow – it is my duty”.

“...as an employee you should obey an order from a boss”

Ethical dilemma/vignette B:

Of the 88 responders’, 78 of them thought the PM did the wrong thing.

“I think the PM did the wrong thing not to tell. It is always the best thing to be honest. ...I should have been honest and told the truth and try to solve the situation thereafter.”

Two students thought he did the right thing, and eight students of the 88 did not give a clear answer.

“I think he did the right thing, it seems like the team could solve the problem without telling the customer”

“...if he can see there was a chance to fix the problems, there is no idea to frighten the customer unnecessarily”

In all of the responders answers there were 99 dictums handling “frankness”, “fairness”, “honesty”, “openness”. Five students (regardless right or wrong) written about asking for help before decision-making. Four of them wrote about cowardliness.

Ethical dilemma/vignette C:

Of the 88 responders, 66 of them (75%) thought the PM did the wrong thing in his decision. 14 students thought he did the right thing, and eight students of the 88 did not give a clear answer.

Most of the students (73) mentions amorality, unethical behaviors or not to be corruptible – even some of them (5) who thinks the PM do the right thing. 51 dictums handled “to be strong”, “fight for your opinion” and 34 students thought the project manager acted illegal. 14 of the students even wrote about changing working place “I could not stand to work in a place where bribes were though of”. In same sentences words like “courage”, “pride”, “honesty” could be seen. Ten dictums criticized the PM action to handle against ethical rules. 14 responders’ highlighted the courage and importance of taking help from another boss in the organization.

“ He did the wrong thing, but If the Vice president says DO IT because they must keep the customer there is no other way.....I would have been more fighting to the Vice president and tell him that it is wrong acting, and also ask why this customer is so important while he is acting this way. I have also asked the VP to take responsibility so we can solve the situation and make clear that it never will appear again.”

“He did the wrong thing. I would have told the customer that bribes is against the policy of the organization. If we not could come along legally, I would have leave the project and quit the job.”

“I think the PM did the wrong thing. To take or give bribes is immoral. I would have said no to bribes, but obviously try to keep the customer and relations as good as possible using legal and ethical rules.”

All of the students, who described the actions as right actions, motivated their choice like: “It is an order”, I have to obey” Half of the ones who were unclear in their decision, used the same words. Some of those students, (13, from all categories, but mostly from right and unclear) wrote about the fear or risk to lose their jobs if they did not obey their boss. Six responders’ showed fears of being find out.

From this category of students, typical answers how they would act themselves are like;

“I should probably have act as the same way as the PM. Important customers can determine an organizations success, and in that case dubious arrangements can be the best option for the organization. To act smooth and easy is always appreciate of both customers and managers even if you not acting morally or legally”

“If my job and my future is adventured if I refuse I would have given the bribe but if I knew that I get along I would not give it.”

“Right thing to do. If the answer is FIX IT while calling the vice president, it is just paying out.”

“If the boss order to keep up a good relation to the customer it is the PM role to obey. He did the right thing.”

After reading and translating the responds of the PMs we find:

Ethical dilemma/vignette A:

Of the 31 responders', most of them (68%) thought the PM did both right and wrong. Right in the way that the PM questioned the decision, but wrong while the PM did not take the fight. The answers where detailed and long (compared to the students answers)

“Initially the PM did the right think....unfortunately he later on said yes to hire an person that he did not believe in.....both in a quality perspective and a time perspective it was a bad choice..... He should not have hire any of them...start the process from de beginning...”

“it depends on his authorization – right if it is said to handle it him selves, wrong if the job belongs to HR”

“right to question the decision.....I always know what kind of PM I want, but sometimes I must do with the PM I get...hence in this case I would have fight more”

Tree of them (1%) thought that he did the right thing (it is my duty, and sometimes you have to approve the state),

“I find that the PM did the right thing. As a PM you have loyalty to the goals, and obviously it should be easier with the external consult to reach the goals according to the PM”

“I have been in the same situation, and it is often so that the PM seldom can choose his members....you must pick your fights, not take them all....he did the right decision”

The others thought that he did the wrong thing.

“If the PM has the full responsibilities to handle the project, his behavior is absolutely wrong while he must carry the responsibility for a non-competent project member which often amount more work and higher costs”

“Wrong because of that the result will be less”

Mostly all of them described the importance of taking the consequences, and said something about the willingness to fight more – “stand up for my sake”.

Ethical dilemma/vignette B:

Of the 31 responders', two of them thought the PM did the right in his decision and the project managers describes that;

“they wouldn’t have worried the customer needlessly.”

Two did not give a clear answer

“...await and see how it falls out”

“if the deadline are very important you may whistle.....but sometimes there are space to not worry the customer unnecessarily.....give a front of that everything’s ok and reach the goal as concerted. A difficult dilemma.”

The rest of the project managers´ (87%) said that it was a wrong decision. Most of the project managers, (even those who said he did the right thing) mention honesty, openness and clarity. Half of them want to analyze the problems further, and present a new plan.

“It is important to act and to be clear while problems arise and not believe that they solve themselves.”

Ethical dilemma/vignette C:

Of the 31 responders´, all of the PMs thought the PM did the wrong thing in his decision. Some of them do pointing out the culture issue, and if the deal handling in another cultural context than Sweden they would have contacted the top manager. Most of them mentions “fight for your opinion”, the importance to “stand for my own values” and “I want to have a good sleep at night”. In same sentences words like “courage”, “pride” and “honesty” could be seen. 33% had quit their job directly.

“It is not only about the unethical behavior PM shows, it is also that the company lacks in distinct and clear business conduct guidelines. I would not work in that kind of organization.”

“I would have paid my own lunch and cleared out that my organization is interested in continued relations but that our ethical guidelines not approve payments to get deals rather our competes and knowledge will be ruling to the customer”

Discussion

We have divided the discussion of our results into two parts, one focusing on the importance of virtue ethics in project management, and one connecting the survey results to quality.

Virtue ethics

Loo’s (2001) study shows there are often no simple answers to ethical dilemmas in the workplace; it depends on who is answering. It is similar result in this research. The result differs between the two groups and also within the groups. There are also similarities in the result, especially in dilemma two and three where the two groups answer in the same direction. The most differences can be seen in dilemma A - 75% of the students said the PM did the wrong thing and only 31% of the PMs. 68% of the PMs thought the PM did both the right and the wrong thing, but none of the students. The well-established PMs did not have same *black and white solutions* to the ethical dilemmas as the students. In the first dilemma (A) the PMs also had longer descriptions in their answers, and they often analyzed the problems further which could be seen as more experience in the field. The PMs answers are generally more in a maximalistic way of thinking according to the students;

“Projects have different kind of reports. A well-established PM know that delays are common...it is the most stupid decision to not tell...you need to be honest and you have to have a thick skin and handle discontent from all stakeholders” (PMs)

“It is wrong. Not to tell your manager can result in very serious consequences”
(student)

To be honest and act right is important according to the PMI code of conduct (2006) which states;

“As practitioners of project management, we are committed to doing what is right and honorable” (PMI, 2006 para1).

What we can see in the study is that many answers to the dilemmas are based on virtue ethics, citing for example the virtue of courage, or the virtue of not being corruptible, or integrity (Crevani & Lennerfors, 2009). While this study only point to the discourses of students and practitioners it is likely that virtues play an important role in their everyday work, and therefore virtue ethics should be further integrated into the theories of professional ethics.

Quality

We can also see glimpses of connections between good behavior and quality, such as the practitioner who stated that "both in a quality perspective and a time perspective it was a bad choice". The empirical connection between ethics and quality is meager, which means that in the empirical reality there is probably not much connection between ethics and quality.

Ethics and quality management, such as TQM, have in common that an integral perspective (Julliard, 2004) - with all employees in the firm actively participate (Andersson et al., 2006) - is needed in order to reach the intended goals (Julliard, 2004). To achieve that, the core value *let everybody be committed* is essential in TQM and stands for facilitating the opportunities for employees to be involved, participate in decision-making and in different improvements. Given co-workers chances to do a good job but also that individual have to take responsibility (Bergman & Klefsjö 2003). In the result the responders' dictums shows willingness to be more involved as a PM;

“to do right as in the *policy*'s must not be the right decision. Maybe there could be another choice...start up the recruitment procedure again” (PMs)

“Take the problem to the top manager or board and explain the risks with hiring wrong competence....if not working resign as PM” (PMs)

“I think he did the wrong thing. He should have been seen the border and try carry through his desires. Do the best thing for the project.....I shouldn't have given up that easy. I would have make war for my own sake higher up in the organization.” (student)

The respondent (PM) wants and needs to be involved in ethical decisions in their organizations but can be difficult while the organizations having a minimalistic view and do not let them in. Organizations have recognized the importance of ethics (Loo, 2001) but it seems that the organizations not fully can handle those issues yet. This minimalistic ethical view is noticed in TQM as well inasmuch as the theory not handling issues about ethics or morality (Wicks, 2001) and implementation problems seem to depend on behavioral difficulties in organizations (Klefsjö et al., 2008). Maybe those negative results while using

TQM (Wicks, 2001) can be a result of no attention of ethical thinking and non-focusing the social dimension?

Conclusions

We began this paper arguing that there is a need to integrate virtue ethics and quality management. The theoretical discussion showed that in the field of quality management there are tendencies to integrate ethics and quality management, for example the EQM (Julliard, 2004). We showed in our empirical study that respondents often used virtue-related words to support their decisions. However, there was not much discussion about the concept of quality in relation to ethics. We maintain that the power of virtue ethics and the fact that it is widespread in business practice should be mobilized for striving for quality in business and organizational processes. Virtue ethics is a well-established framework in practice, although it is not so much used in professional codes of conduct, and theories about business ethics.

Although the self-improving style of virtue ethics does not come forth in the empirical study, our theoretical review shows that one of the fundamental aspects of virtue ethics is the embodiment of the constant strive to build character, to practice virtues, and avoid vices, in order to reach eudaimonia - or human flourishing. While it is quite obvious that business ethics should include a focus on building character, in quality management, such as EQM, these insights should also be integrated.

Building character is important in the pursuit of quality. It rhymes well with *continuous improvement* in Total Quality Management, but it brings a personal dimension into continuous improvement. By improving processes, one improves oneself, which indeed could lead to yet improved processes. By focusing on the pursuit of character and the building of oneself as an important part in processes of quality, there is also a motivational aspect in urging people to be committed to improving themselves, while at the same time contributing to the goals of the organization. Improving oneself can also lead to eudaimonia. The dimension of *Focus on processes* does also come through with virtue ethics which is a much more processual ethics, than either consequentialism or deontology. The character of a person can improve, but it can also degenerate. One must work continuously in order to promote generation and avoid degeneration.

So, in our opinion organizations should be inspired by the attempts to bring in ethics into quality management, such as EQM, but there is a need to take it a step further and also bring in virtues to throw light at the importance of the personal dimension. Let everybody be more self-awareness of once part in the organization with a keen sense of the virtues and values of what they do in the organization (Solomon, 1992) as the purpose of the PMI code state;

“The purpose of this Code is to instill confidence in the project management profession and to help an individual become a better practitioner, by establishing a profession-wide understanding of appropriate behavior” (PMI, 2006).

Organizations have to find out what kind of behaviors (virtues) is necessary for quality improvements and what kind of character is best for co-worker working with quality issues. Heinz (H. J. Heinz Company, 2012) seems to have a point with “Quality is to a product what a character is to a man” - quality and virtue ethics have a connection to each other.

To sum up, we can see that:

- TQM and ethics have in common that an integral perspective is needed in order to achieve the intended goals
- Quality management can benefit from a more direct engagement with theories of virtue ethics.
- Virtue ethics is prevalent within professional ethics, such as project management ethics, and could therefore be mobilized to contribute to quality management.
- Virtue ethics, as maximalistic ethics, is not enough, but must be complemented with a minimalistic ethics to promote quality

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