ORGL-503, Module 3:

Values and Moral Decision Making in Communities

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When creating a community, the foundation that community is built on must consider shared values, create trust, and be united on common ground. Within the film *Twelve Angry Men*, we see the creation of a jury as a small group community, and how Henry Fonda slowly builds a community construct and finds ways to personally connect on an emotional and value-based level to help persuade each of the men in their ethical decision making. With each man reached in a different way, we see examples of how to best relate to different backgrounds, experiences, personalities, and perspectives. Using the approach of finding commonalities in our shared values, it is possible to learn and grow interpersonally and through the relationships and the communities that we create. As we learn, "community implies that everyone's interests will best be served when working toward a collective set of shared values and common purpose" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, pp. 92-93). With personal agendas and different forms of prejudice, subjective biases start to overrule the objective points of views turning the room into a contest. What Henry Fonda's character was able to do within this film was shown through his own leadership and personal values. Fonda was able to eventually connect on all perspectives on shared values and show the men the importance of the principles that each of them stood for, and past the ethical dilemmas. Fonda started to create a cooperative orientation amongst all group members, knowing that the success of the group decision making was dependent on all members of the jury finding a decision together (Johnson, 2007, p. 148).

In this paper, I will further discuss what can be learned from ethical decision making, how to approach our own ethical dilemmas, and what can be learned about group

interactions involving our own value propositions and the creation of a cooperative community. In addition, I will clearly outline the risks of creating values and how ethical dilemmas are faced as a process. "Asking ethical questions is the quickest way of brining ethical principles, education, and reflection in the decision making process" (Spitzer, 2000, p. 241). Ultimately, I will provide recommendations and a clear outline of how our individual values can play a part in how a community is created and what it is founded upon, further relating to how we act as individuals to ensure healthy relationships that "build consensus around shared values" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 85).

<div align="center">**Ethical Values and Principles within the Film**</div>

One of the toughest tasks that Fonda had to do, especially in the beginning, was face the difficulty of staying true to his values and standing alone (Johnson, 2007, pp. 153-154). One of the many ethical dilemmas that came into play for the group was the idea of putting personal self-importance above that of justice, in this case, another man's life. Though ostracized and severely questioned for his opinions and stance taken, he stood tall and kept his own values in mind ahead of all. Standing Fonda simply said that he wasn't sure and wanted to discuss more before jumping to any conclusions, voicing his interpersonal conflict of facing the ethical dilemma of an uninformed decision. Fonda did not give in to the group mentality and decided to dig deeper and look further into the case to best decide for himself instead of letting others influence his decision making. Fonda was able to provide sound decision making to the group by providing clarity to the case and explaining his stance in a collected manner and through active engagement, embodying the idea that "minorities are most influential when consistently advocating their positions" (Johnson, 2007, p. 154).

The Vulnerabilities of Groupthink

Fonda was also able to overcome the idea of 'groupthink' through his individual stance and by providing perspective on how to approach his own stance and values (Johnson, 2007, p. 155). Groupthink can become a slippery slope for individuals under high-pressure situations when there are directive leaders that push for their own solution, and when they are isolated from other groups (Johnson, 2007, p. 155). This is exactly the situation that this jury found itself in, as there were commanding personalities from other jury members that tried to influence group decision making based on their own opinions and biases. Groupthink can further suffer when there is a failure to consider different alternatives and weigh all of the information, reexamine the path being taken if it may not be leading to the best possible outcome, and talk about the moral issues at hand with the situation (Johnson, 2005, 218). This relates to the idea of mismanaged agreement, as "groups frequently run into trouble when members publicly express their support for decisions that they oppose in private" (Johnson, 2007, p. 158). Unfortunately, this can happen all too easily when people find themselves 'digging a hole too deep,' and end up finding themselves in situations that they are not prepared for. When there is an escalated commitment, people tend to stick to their original decision making to justify earlier choices in an effort to retain their own credibility (Johnson, 2007, p. 160).

Character Analysis

We see many different characters bring their own personalities and perspectives to the decision making in ways the show the good and bad parts of ethical decision making. Outside of Fonda's methodical and collected manner, we see fiery and stubborn characters that snap at Fonda when provoked, such as the owner of the messenger service

and the garage owner. We see passive characters that are easily directed and pushed around, such as the bank owner and the advertising man. We see impatient characters that aren't educated on the situation, such as the salesman and the working man. This known, all group members have the ethical and moral responsibility to the commitment of creating a value-based community and should be aware of how their decisions reflect on their individual reputations and ethical decision making. Even when met with resistance and when it seemed as though just the last two or three remaining members of the group were holding out due to stubbornness, Fonda was able to find a way to influence the situation so that he could let them discover why he saw the young man as innocent so that they could see why others had started to join his side. This sense of individualism is something that he overcame through his sense of connection to the other group members and his creation of a new cooperative group (Johnson, 2007, p. 148). The first person to stand up to the group after Fonda was the old man, and he used his own courage in his beliefs even when met with opposition. When the old man and Fonda seem on the outside of the group, the idea of moral exclusion plays in, as it can be exceptionally easy to unconsciously forget about how to treat others fairly when thinking about opinions in relation to justice (Johnson, 2007, p. 162). This was largely evident when group members felt threatened by people moving toward the side of 'not guilty,' and away from the group. This creates bias and contributes to favoritism, taking away from ethical obligations that we have as individuals when staying true to values.

Decision Making when Creating a Community

Within a work setting, I think many individual and group practices can be easily used to create more ethical and inclusive decision making in an effort to better serve

those around us and lead in a more positive and productive way. In my career, I have had

many interactions with people and working in groups that have required a significant

amount of idea-generating, creativity, and listening. Most recently, I worked as part of a

group where our direct manager was not located in our office. Working in Pittsburgh as a

group with our manager located in New York required a high sense of accountability and

communication for productive group work to happen and for our entire team to be

successful. Above all, it was most important to be accountable for ourselves in relation to

group activities and individual assignments. It could have been very easy to mismanage

occupational responsibilities without considering any moral responsibilities. If individual

mindsets are not approached correctly before the community is created, then the

foundation of the community might be built around partiality and without the moral

obligations that we all should be aware of. We created our sense of decision making on

shared values, and communication was an invaluable piece of how we worked together

and related to our manager. At the forefront of any situation, it is critical to make sure the

group understands how communication is intended versus how it is received. It is

imperative to use this communication to be aware of how our own behavior is reflected

on the group to create value-added community for all members. "Developing shared

values is more about asking people for their input than it is about telling them the

answers" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 89). When creating these groups and communities,

we can express the importance of the moral obligation that each of us have, as "members

can pool their information, divide up assignments, draw from a variety of perspectives,

and challenge questionable assumptions" (Johnson, 2005, p. 216). We can further work

with the creation of self-directed teams and encourage the move away from groupthink,

as a new perspective and great group unity can be achieved through teamthink, which encourages open thinking, a variety of perspectives, and respect for open thinking and collaboration (Johnson, 2005, p. 220). This releases tension from group collaboration as it allows all individuals to have an equal say and moves away from the group mentality of single-minded thinking and authoritative direction. "Teamthink, like thought self-leadership, is a combination of mental imagery, self-dialogue, and realistic thinking" (Johnson, 2005, p. 220). This encourages communication and allows all parties to contribute and challenge the direction of the group in a healthy setting. To best understand this, "communication is the key to both the relationships between group members and the quality of their ethical choices" (Johnson, 2005, p. 2003). This communication encourages understanding, engagement, problem solving, and evaluation of the matter at hand. Lastly, as leaders it is most important for the individual to understand their own responsibility and how it will relate to the group thinking at hand. To understand the pressures of acting as an individual, each individual is obligated to act with integrity and is ethically responsible for their own behavior and choices "Group membership does not excuse us from our individual ethical responsibilities. In small groups, our behaviors can have a significant impact on the team's ethical success or failure" (Johnson, 2007, p. 148). What is most important in creating these groups within organizations is deciding how to approach this with honesty and clarity, so that as individuals, there is positive contribution focused around the shared values of the group.

Ethical Decision Making – Dilemmas and Difficulties

As important as values are, it is critical to best understand how to define values so that they are clearly understood, perceived, and ultimately upheld by group members

when creating an inclusive community (Cha & Edmondson, 2006, p. 71). This helps define expectations from the start and allows for greater transparency so that all group members have an idea of beliefs. It can be very easy to misunderstand where group values may be leading, so value expansion must stay consistent with core values so that hypocrisy is not concluded (Cha & Edmondson, 2006, p. 71). Even in events of crisis, ethical decisions must be upheld to best make sure that values are fully sustained (Christensen & Kohls, 2003, p. 332). There are factors that can affect our decision making and create potential tension with our values. "The effects brought on by stress create conditions under which the ability of the decision maker or organization to adapt and cope is significantly reduced" (Christensen & Kohls, 2003, p. 336). We must be acutely aware of when a crisis might be happening and how this might be affecting our decision making, as this can define our group, knowing that a "critical aspect of coping with crisis is the loss of or preservation of ethical decision making" (Christensen & Kohls, 2003, p. 353). If we understand how this might influence the decisions that we make, we will be better equipped to handle the task at hand and avoid straying from our core values as a group. With this, moral intensity helps identify the gravity of the situation and the magnitude of the consequences (Christensen & Kohls, 2003, p. 349). Primarily, we can use these crisis management understandings and techniques to better understand how to make ethical decisions under pressure and better manage our core values (Christensen, 2003, p. 346).

Conclusion

Values play a very important role in how leaders contribute to the overall wellbeing of group mentality, in how we learn from different perspectives, and in how we

face ethical dilemmas. We take lessons in times of moral challenge to better create a

vision of shared values by identifying the best ways to relate challenges and ethical

obligations within the greater goals of the group. It can be easy to lose sight of individual

values when the group values are leaning toward another direction, which is a challenge

and an opportunity to rely on our values in our decision making (Johnson, 2007). In this

sense, we must pay attention to the significance of equality, and eliminate notions of

hierarchy and advantage, contributing to the ideas of fairness and removing bias (Cha &

Edmonson, 2006, p. 64). We can learn from group mentality that providing the value of

'openness' creates a focused idea of collaboration and increased communication that can

be utilized by all group members with a more encouraging and communicative

environment, just as Fonda did in *Twelve Angry Men*. (Cha & Edmondson, 2006, p. 64).

As we continue to learn, principles help form ethical communities and commitments to

the community that help create is the basis of community. "If a principle is commonly

accepted, people expect it to be adhered to, and hence they base their decisions on it"

(Spitzer, 2000, p. 216). These principles can be further compounded be the reinforcement

of virtue and knowing that it is possible to hold oneself to greater self-discipline and

humility when trying to best understand the ways to uphold principles and better

understand different perspectives with an objective point of view. Within *Twelve Angry*

Men, we learn lessons on the value of how an individual can affect group thinking, and

how the values that each individual carries with them affect the greater good of the group.

Ultimately, it is up to each of us to act with character and realize the moral obligations

and responsibilities that we have when contributing to a group and learn about how our

moral obligations affect our individual and group decisions.

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