

Preface

I first considered editing a case study book on organizational ethics nearly a decade ago. As an instructor of organizational communication, I was frustrated by two features that were lacking in most textbooks in the field. First, I found that many of the primary textbooks in organizational communication included few, if any, case studies. By contrast, Business and Management programs had a long and successful history with case-based teaching and, as a result, cases were widely available. Yet, they did not necessarily offer the range and variety of perspectives I wanted my students to learn.

Although I had developed many of my own cases over the years, including a semester-long consulting case, I wondered why there was such a lack of cases in organizational communication textbooks. Most textbooks included discussion questions and even the occasional homework or fieldwork assignment, but these features never provided the extensive application of organizational theory that in-depth cases provided for my students. When cases were included in textbooks, they were typically short and general in their description of organizational phenomena. Until recently, there was even a lack of supplemental case study books to use in introductory or advanced organizational communication courses. I wanted more for my students.

Second, it also became clear that few, if any, textbooks included an extensive discussion of organizational ethics. Given the range and scope of organizational misconduct over the past several decades, it struck me as a glaring omission in our teaching. Based on conversations with other colleagues around the world, I knew that many instructors were, at least implicitly, discussing organizational ethics in their classrooms. But I found that many were reluctant to explicitly identify organizational ethics as an issue in their courses. Textbooks were not much help. When they included ethics, it was often relegated to a concluding chapter. Business ethics books have been available for years, but they seemed to define “organizations” and communication very narrowly. For example, rarely were nonprofit organizations, government agencies, universities, churches, or other collectives discussed in them. In addition, they often included classic, historical cases of ethics rather than recent emerging ethical issues most relevant to today’s students.

The confluence of these two pedagogical frustrations was further set in motion with the series of organizational scandals (e.g., Enron, Arthur Andersen, Tyco, WorldCom) that have received such attention in the past decade. For this second edition, they have been further compounded by the ethical misconduct in the financial sector that has produced the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. For years, my former students had contacted me about their own personal ethical dilemmas in organizations, but now my current students were asking important but challenging questions: What went wrong with

these organizations? Why? How common are such unethical practices in organizations? Is this a new phenomenon? What should I do if I belong to an organization that engages in unethical behavior? What if I observe a boss or coworker engaging in such behavior? What changes are necessary in order to improve the ethical conduct of organizations and the people in them? What can I do to help?

Their questions led to informative, instructive, and wide-ranging discussions of organizations and ethics, but I wanted a framework for discussing ethical issues with them in both a theoretical and a pragmatic way. This book, then, is an attempt to focus and structure a meaningful and productive dialogue about organizational ethics with students. It is designed to integrate ethical theory and practice in order to strengthen students' ethical awareness, judgment, and action in organizations by exploring ethical dilemmas in a diverse range of cases. For this, the second edition of the book, the need to improve our ethical behavior in organizations seems even more pronounced.

USES FOR THE BOOK

The book may be used in a variety of ways. Ideally, its availability will prompt some instructors to begin teaching courses on organizational ethics. In such courses, it may be used as a primary textbook. Or it may be used as a supplemental text for an introductory or advanced course in organizational communication. The book will serve as an excellent companion to a primary textbook in order to bring ethics to the foreground of students' attention. As such, the book not only includes discussions of ethical perspectives and practices but the case studies also cover a range of topics typical in many organizational communication courses such as leadership, teamwork, organizational culture, work-family balance, gender, new technologies, organizational change, crisis communication, decision making, power/resistance, and conflict, as well as emerging topics such as telecommuting, offshoring, and social media, among others. In addition, instructors will notice that many of the cases can be easily applied to common theories of organizational communication such as classical management, human relations, systems theory, critical theory, and postmodern theory.

WHY TEACH ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS?

This ethics case study book is based on the belief that organizational theory and practice have become increasingly wide ranging and diverse in the past two decades. Similar to the emergence of new, diverse theories to understand organizations, organizations themselves are growing more and more complex. Their size, mission, function, structure, and processes all seem increasingly fluid as organizations become more "emergent" and adaptable. As a result, books on organizational dynamics cannot necessarily present singular, simplistic explanations of "the way organizations are." Rather, they must provide students with a range of organizational examples that best approximate the current and future evolution of organizations—and the practices among and between them.

One of the most recent shifts in organizations is a renewed interest in ethics, partly in response to recent scandals but also in response to the desire to rethink the role of organizations in our lives. Members of organizations are asking themselves the following questions: What are our mission, vision, and goals? What do we value? What principles should guide our behavior with our multiple stakeholders? No longer is it accepted wisdom that “business ethics” is a contradiction in terms. Instead, questions of ethics are being taken seriously by many organizations around the world, particularly now that executives and boards of directors have realized that ethics may actually enhance individual and organizational performance. Rather than being viewed as merely a compliance or crisis issue, ethics is now seen as part of the bottom line.

The intent of this book, then, is to raise students’ awareness regarding ethics and to provide them with the tools to evaluate situations and conduct themselves ethically. It introduces students to a broad, yet context-specific range of ethics-oriented issues in organizations that will supplement and extend their understanding of organizational communication. The book is based on the belief that students are best engaged when they can directly address the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their own organizational lives. Often these challenges and opportunities converge around ethical dilemmas that workers experience, as they seek to negotiate their interests with those of their organization.

As a pedagogical tool, this book is designed to encourage students’ critical thinking skills about ethics through analysis, reflection, and dialogue. Organizational ethics cases do not present easy, linear answers to organizational problems and, as a result, students will learn to explore complex, contextual, and conflicted questions about organizational life in ways that integrate theory and practice. A primary purpose of the book, then, is to further develop students’ understanding of organizations by stimulating analysis and discussion of specific organizational practices that enable or constrain ethical action, thereby provoking multiple alternatives or solutions that are made more accessible to them. Additional features of the book include the following:

- An introductory chapter that explores multiple perspectives of ethics
- An innovative discussion of the most common practices of ethical organizations
- Timely case studies that examine a range of ethical dilemmas in diverse organizations
- Discussion questions at the end of each case study to prompt dialogue regarding the opportunities for, and challenges of, ethical behavior in today’s organizations
- An afterword that raises new, challenging questions for ethical behavior in today’s organizations

WHY USE CASE STUDIES?

All too often I have overheard students in the buildings and on the sidewalks of universities describing courses in the following fashion: “It’s a theory course” or “It’s a practical course.” On the one hand, students are dissatisfied when courses belabor what is common sense. On the other hand, they are even more dissatisfied when courses have no clear

bearing on everyday life. One of the ways to bridge this dichotomy is to recognize that understanding is the joint product of theory and common sense. As Karl Weick (1987) aptly explained, “Theory and research should focus on what people routinely overlook when they apply common sense. Theory should not be redundant with common sense; it should remind people of what they forget” (p.106).

Ideally, then, this book should combine theory and practice as it relates to organizational ethics. My assumption is that the two are mutually dependent. For instance, we all use implicit theories of the world around us to guide our behaviors. When those theories do not seem applicable to everyday life, then we adjust them accordingly. The same should hold true for the theories and practice of organizational ethics. Through this book, students will examine various theories of organizational ethics. Yet each ethical perspective should also be judged according to its applicability to the cases in this book. By studying these specific organizational cases, students should develop the critical thinking skills to determine which theories are applicable and which theories are not. They should also gain an appreciation for what “works” and what “doesn’t work” in organizations when it comes to ethics.

Yet, this appreciation—and the knowledge that derives from it—cannot simply be told in a lecture. It is based on doing. According to Thomas Donaldson, the “case method,” as it is often called, builds on the Socratic method of teaching, which involves the active involvement of students who explore, question, and discover in the give and take process with an instructor and fellow students.

In my teaching career, I have found that one of the primary teaching challenges is to provide students with concrete, context-specific knowledge that will supplement their past work experiences, which vary widely from student to student. Many college students often need supplemental materials that ground their theoretical understanding in a practical understanding of organizational life. This is particularly true in terms of ethical challenges that students may face once they enter (or reenter) the full-time workforce.

Many instructors draw upon their own research and/or consulting experience to help supplement students’ work experiences. Or they utilize the short, limited case studies that are often found at the end of chapters in textbooks. However, many instructors complain that such cases provide neither the detail nor the full range of organizational opportunities/challenges that will develop the critical thinking skills necessary for students to comprehend the complexities of organizations. Finally, instructors often question whether a primary text, alone, allows students to confront—in a safe, classroom environment—the ethical dilemmas that many workers face in their careers.

In the future, then, I believe that students will need to understand both the theoretical developments in organizational communication and also how those developments are enacted in ethical organizational practice. This book, then, is designed to address this focus on praxis in a manner that clarifies the rapidly changing organizational environment—as well as the diversity of organizational practices that has followed these changes. In short, students need an explicit mechanism by which they can compare and contrast a growing number of developments in organizations. In addition, students need to understand and appropriately act upon the various ethical dilemmas and challenges they will confront in the workplace. Case studies of ethical and unethical organizational practices are one of the primary means to accomplish these goals.

Through case studies, students and instructors are able to directly assess ethical and unethical decision making in a rich, diverse, and complex manner that moves beyond only theoretical discussions of ethics (e.g., duty, rights, utility, virtue, relationships). In short, this case study book explores “ethics in action” and, as a result, is both theoretical and practical in its focus.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The Introduction provides the context for organizational ethics and an overview of ethical perspectives and practices. It explores current and past examples of ethical and unethical conduct in organizations. It also introduces students to some of the most important challenges for enhancing the ethics of organizations, as well as a means for analyzing ethical dilemmas they may face in organizations. Finally, the Introduction provides the theoretical foundation for students and is divided into two primary sections: (1) ethical perspectives and (2) ethical practices. The section on ethical perspectives gives students an overview of common ethical theories such as duty, rights, utility, virtue, and relationships. These theories provide one means for students to assess the case studies. Any—or all—of the theories may be applied to each case study, although students may find that one theory is either more prominent or more relevant in a case. The section on ethical practices explores several behaviors that are most common among ethical organizations, including alignment, dialogic communication, participation, transparency, accountability, and courage. Each practice is then applied to both ethical and unethical organizations.

Parts I through VI include 23 case studies that represent a range of organizational types and ethical dilemmas. Cases include not only business but also nonprofit organizations, universities, and government agencies. The cases are organized according to the ethical practices discussed in the Introduction. However, students may find that several of the ethical practices may be relevant to each case. As a result, instructors should use the structure of this section only as a preliminary guide for exploring the case studies. For example, the cases could also be discussed according to topic (e.g., leadership, organizational culture, decision making) or according to theory (e.g., classical management, human relations, systems theory). At the least, though, students should also be prepared to discuss each case according to the ethical perspectives (e.g., duty, rights, utility, virtue, relationships).

The book ends with the Afterword, which reminds students why our discourse around ethics matters. It also extends ethics to broader organizational and cultural issues and proposes a revised ethical theory. Finally, it offers several alternative directions for students interested in further pursuing organizational ethics.

My hope is that the book will stimulate not only dialogue about but also action on issues of organizational ethics. The recent scandals have brought public attention to the practices of both unethical and ethical organizations and, as a result, we have a rare opportunity to help our students create organizations of the future that are simultaneously productive and ethical. Whether as employees, citizens, consumers, or stakeholders, our students will hopefully make that difference in their own organizational lives.

BENEFITS OF CASE STUDIES

Case studies are one of the best ways to engage in dialogue about the real, day-to-day ethical dilemmas in organizations. They are also an ideal way to apply theories learned in the classroom, whether they are ethical theories or organizational theories (e.g., see Donaldson & Gini, 1996; Keyton & Schockley-Zalaback, 2004; Sypher, 1997). This case studies book is based on the assumption that you need to not only understand the theoretical developments in organizational studies but you also should know how they are enacted in ethical organizational practice.

This book, then, is designed to address this focus on praxis in a manner that clarifies the rapidly changing organizational environment—as well as the diversity of organizational practices that has followed these changes. In short, you need an explicit mechanism by which you can compare and contrast a growing number of developments in organizations. In addition, you will need to be prepared to understand and appropriately act upon the various ethical dilemmas and challenges you may confront in your organizational lives. Case studies of ethical and unethical organizational practices are one of the primary means to accomplish these goals.

Case studies, in general, offer several benefits:

- Case studies provide an opportunity to explore the real-world functioning of organizations in context.
- Case studies stimulate reflection on others' actions.
- Case studies provide exemplars of appropriate and inappropriate, productive and unproductive, useful and irrelevant behaviors.
- Case studies prompt lively discussion regarding alternative courses of action.
- Case studies provide an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations.
- Case studies serve as an impetus for future action.

More specifically, the case studies in this book may also be used to develop skills in these primary areas:

- Ethical engagement—You should develop the desire to pursue ethical issues in greater detail and establish your own independent thinking about ethics.
- Ethical reasoning and decision-making—You should develop greater confidence in your judgments and in your ability to understand and appreciate others' points of view regarding ethics.
- Ethical practice—You should develop the ability to respond to and proactively address ethical challenges that may arise in your life.

Case studies, then, should increase your motivation and interest in ethical issues, should improve your analytical and critical thinking skills around ethical challenges, and should provide you with a foundation for making organizations more ethical.

CASE STUDIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

My hope is that this book will motivate you to think more critically about organizational ethics in your own life and also in the lives of others. More specifically, the book will (1) introduce you to a range of ethical theories based on duty, rights, utility, virtue, and relationships and (2) explore case studies of organizations that either enable or constrain common elements of ethical practice such as alignment, dialogic communication, participation, transparency, accountability, and courage.

One of the reasons I was motivated to edit this volume is because many organizational case study books tend to be both atheoretical and ahistorical in their focus and typically marginalize ethics. By contrast, this book seeks to conceptualize and historicize ethics-oriented cases by (1) providing a theoretical foundation of ethical perspectives that can be applied to them, (2) identifying sets of ethical practices that might serve as examples for future organizational behavior, and (3) drawing upon their relationship to other cases (e.g., within an industry, a nation-state, a profession) within a particular period of time. The contributors to the book were encouraged to utilize their own scholarly strengths and expertise to develop fuller, richer cases, while also supplementing their expertise with additional historical and current resources. As such, the cases should be seen merely as a starting point for a more thorough and complex understanding of the cases themselves—and others that may be related to them by topic, issue, ethical perspective, or practice.

The cases in this volume were selected because they focus on organizations that have confronted challenging ethical dilemmas and, as a result, have acted ethically or unethically in response to them. That is, the cases in the book represent a full range of organizational practices, from overt violations of the law to exemplars of responsible behavior. Each case, however, is written to direct you to ethical dilemmas that present tensions, contradictions, challenges, and/or opportunities for the organization and others that it affects. You will also notice that, in contrast to some other case study books, these cases are about real—rather than hypothetical—organizations. I believe it is important for such organizations to be included in a case study book, first to present you with a realistic account of organizational life and second to hold unethical organizations accountable and to praise ethical organizations.

As you will see when you read the cases, contributors were asked to define organization broadly to include not only businesses but also other types of organizations (e.g., educational institutions, religious institutions, political organizations, nonprofit organizations) and organizing, in general. This is in stark contrast to most business ethics case study books that focus exclusively on corporations. Contributors were also encouraged to write cases that examined broader cultural constructions of work (e.g., work and identity, work–family balance, welfare-to-work programs, health care and work, globalization) that are so relevant to our everyday lives. The book, then, not only explores ethical issues within organizations but also within the social, political, economic, ideological, and technological contexts that affect, and are affected by, organizations.

Each case also examines a unique dimension of organizational communication. Some cases focus on the communication response of organizations after a product or service has failed. Other cases in the book explore the communication strategies of leaders who have

produced ethical organizations. Or, in some cases, communication is discussed as a means to “frame” organizational decisions. Still others explore how gender, race, and family are constructed in and through communication within organizations.

You will also notice that a variety of sources were used in constructing these cases about organizational ethics, including observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documents (e.g., company documents, media coverage, legal materials, legislative hearings, professional association studies/reports). As a result, some cases are organized chronologically to follow a timeline of events while others are structured in a narrative form.

Regardless of the structure of each case, though, you should first identify the ethical dilemmas that are raised in the case. Once you have identified the ethical dilemmas, use the ethical perspectives and practices in combination with outside resource materials to fully understand, appreciate, and discuss their complexities. You should be able to understand the context of the case, the evolution of the ethical dilemmas, and the key actors facing them. Finally, as you develop your own opinions about the cases, be sure to consider alternative views that may be presented by your instructor or by other students. Doing so strengthens your “ethical agility” and better prepares you for the variety of ethical dilemmas you may confront in the future.

Although I will not recount all of the cases here, you will find a wide array of organizations and ethical issues in this volume. Here are some of the cases:

- Walmart—The case examines criticisms of the company that its economic impact “limits the ability of local businesses to survive.” The case study also examines how Walmart has responded to charges that it negatively affects local businesses.
- British Petroleum (BP)—The case examines the range of decisions that led to the country’s largest oil spill that damaged not only natural resources in southern states but also the livelihood of many workers there.
- Mitsubishi—The case addresses a class action sexual discrimination lawsuit by several female employees of the company and explores their claims, as well as the company and union responses to them.
- Aon Hewitt—The case considers the degree to which single and married employees with families should be treated similarly or differently.
- Enron—The case explores the ways in which overidentification of employees can cause them to overlook, if not misrepresent, unethical behavior in an organization.
- Toyota—The case discusses how Toyota sought to manage a product recall crisis in ways that maintained its reputation for safe vehicles.
- Google—The case explores the extent to which Google negotiated policies with the Chinese government that allowed broader access to users’ data and content.
- College Athletics and Integrity—The case examines scandals and fraud in several university athletic departments that have increasingly focused on the financial benefits of sports programs at the expense of academic integrity.

- Wyeth—The case discusses how human health can be negatively affected when a pharmaceutical company ghostwrites articles for prestigious medical journals, without the general knowledge of physicians and patients.

As students of organizations, it is particularly important that you be able to first identify current trends regarding ethics and then, second, to intervene in the emergence, development, and acceptance (or rejection) of those trends. The case studies should help you in that process. Before we move to the cases themselves, though, it is important for you to have some additional background information regarding a range of ethical perspectives and ethical practices. The Introduction will provide that theoretical and practical foundation for you to thoroughly explore the case studies. The Introduction should give you the tools to understand, critique, and apply theoretical and practical material to the cases and, ultimately, to consider alternative, ethical futures for organizations.

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