

Storytelling as a Method of Teaching Management Ethics: An Ancient Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Management Ethics is a subject that is very relevant in the present era and which lends itself to a number of different perspectives. Its study is difficult because ethics itself is subjective in nature varying from one country and culture to the other. It is not enough to understand ethics superficially at a mental level but is something to be internalised so that all decisions are subconsciously filtered through it. Storytelling, sharing anecdotes and case study discussions are pedagogical methods that work well in teaching abstract concepts as well as in creating a moral base in the learner. The study finds that Indian texts treat ethics or Dharma and business ethics Rajadharma differently. Kautilya in his Arthashastra, which is considered as the finest Indian text on strategic governance gives a clear structure for ethical management decision making. Epics like Mahabharata beyond being religious texts also carry plenty of moral stories connected to ethical decisions. The study further finds that Arthashastra which is strongly rooted in Dharma was taught to children in the form of stories called the Panchatantra and the mode of teaching was found to be widespread and very effective.

Keywords

Ethics, Management, Panchatantra, Pedagogy, Teaching

Introduction

Ethics and morality has gained increasing importance over recent years, in daily life as well as in business and management. But the idea of morality and thereby ethics is subjective to a large extent and hence difficult to define. The concept of what is ethical varies from culture to culture. It follows naturally that ethics has been interpreted in many ways.

According to Quintelier et al. (2011) Normative ethics discusses issues of right and wrong, as well as the criteria used to discern them. It is not about how the world *is*, but how it should be. Normative theories

tries to give answers to the moral question of what one ought to do or ought not to do. The importance of one's character and thoughts of what kind of person one must be are emphasised in virtue ethics. Utilitarianism maintains that one should strive for the maximum good for the largest amount of people, and that this aim should be pursued regardless of other considerations, such as a wish for revenge.

Deontology, on the other hand, literally means "science of obligation," but it starts with the premise that both good and evil are determined by an individual's intentions rather than the results of their actions. This theory was put forth by Immanuel Kant (1956, 1969) and is called the Kantian analysis.

These views of what constitute ethics is but the tip of the iceberg. There are many other definitions of the same. In such a scenario how do you teach ethics to the budding business graduate? Is it enough to give them a list of what is ethical and unethical and reasons for the same? Will that make them tread the straight and narrow in terms of moral responsibility in their chosen careers?

Story telling as a Pedagogy

Presenting a message is merely the first step in effective communication, claims Flynn (2015). Message resistance is a significant communication difficulty. No matter how beautifully a message is delivered, if the recipient wilfully rejects it, the anticipated change in attitude or behaviour won't occur. When the goal is to influence both cognition and action in a specific way, the internal processing of the information influences the changes in a person's attitudes and beliefs. Researchers in the fields of social cognition have long placed a strong emphasis on this internal processing of communication.

The social and cultural activity of telling stories, sometimes with improvisation, showmanship, or embellishment, is known as storytelling. Every culture has its own myths or tales that are told to one another for purposes of amusement, instruction, cultural preservation, or establishing moral ideals. The earliest and most well-established method for humans to memorise and retain knowledge was through stories (Abrahamson, 1998).

In communities and social settings that provide a real social basis for how to apply knowledge, learning is most creative, claim Andrews et al. (2009). In this approach, they showed how stories may be used as a tool to spread knowledge in a social setting. Alterio (2003) asserts that storytelling is a potent and enduring means of communication. Yang (2013) discovered that stories are more persuasive than statements or numerical data because they elicit emotional responses. The story itself serves as the primary vehicle for expressing the author's point of view and ideals. Its structure permits the transmission

of complex emotions. The told stories emphasise the emotional component rather than the intellectual one. Because of the peculiarities of the human mind, the emotional component of the story makes it more effective in learning (Byun 2016). According to Kun et al. (2017), the majority of the information held in human consciousness is not fragmentary but rather related to a number of short stories.

Miller and Pennycuff (2008) remind us that using storytelling to engage and encourage even the most hesitant students may be a useful strategy in formal learning situations. One of the earliest methods of instruction, storytelling has the capacity to develop emotional intelligence and provide children an understanding of human behaviour that they will retain in their subconscious minds. This learning in turn provides the basis for analysing any situation in a value driven manner.

Statement of the problem

In this day of widespread consumerism and corruption, management ethics is attracting a lot of attention. It is a topic of study that is very significant and has a variety of viewpoints. It is not enough to have a superficial understanding of ethics on a mental level; it must be ingrained and internalised so that all decisions are filtered via its moral lens instinctively and spontaneously. Storytelling as a pedagogy is very effective in this aspect. This study focuses on how Ancient India has imbibed storytelling as a means of teaching management ethics.

Objective of the study

The questions for the research are:

1. Indian concept of management ethics
2. Understanding the means of teaching management ethics in Ancient India
3. Use of storytelling in olden times for teaching morality and management ethics.

Management Ethics: Indian Concept

According to Christie et al. (2003), compared to American ones, Indian business executives find it much harder to make ethical decisions. Professional managers in the United States are inclined to take a more analytical approach that results in a more straightforward procedure. Indian corporate executives have a more ingrained, instinctive approach to ethical decision-making, based on the circumstances, which frequently leads to a conflict between their individual and professional life that is difficult to overcome.

An analysis of the Indian concept of Management Ethics is likely to give a reason for this ethical dilemma. It will also provide the difference between the Western and Indian concept of what Ethics is. To understand the Indian concept of Management Ethics we have to study Dharma as defined by the ancient Dharmasastras and further the Indian concept of management ethics as defined by Arthashastra and the connect between the two.

The Indian concept that is most similar to or defines ethics and morality in the Western Lexicon is Dharma. As per Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1936) Dharma is a code of behaviour that is reinforced by the general public's conscience. It is not subjective in the sense that it is imposed by the individual's conscience, nor is it external in the sense that it is enforced by the law. Dharma does not push persons to be good, but rather prepares them to be so. It is a living force that develops and changes in reaction to the evolution of society, rather than a set of mechanical laws. Dharma goes beyond morality and ethics and can be defined as the natural order. It is an idea that is dynamic and has derivatives, such as Swadharama, which is used to describe one's responsibility or calling as well as Yugadharma, which refers to the Dharma's changing meaning with each epoch.

As per Chattopadhyaya DR (2006) Dharma literally means "that which is established" or "something which firmly unites people." Law, rule, usage, practise, custom, ordinance, or legislation are some of its additional definitions. Dharma also refers to moral excellence, virtue, justice, and good deeds.

Rajadharama and Applied Ethics

When it comes to Management Ethics the Western mindset looks at it as Applied Ethics. Applied Ethics analyses social and professional situations through a moral perspective in order to make or accept decisions. The area of applied ethics include legal ethics, medical ethics, media ethics and business or managerial ethics. (Sandu, 2012). According to Ciulei (2013) applied ethics is supported by the main ethical philosophies of the day, in the sense that it cannot carry value judgements in the absence of ratifications and explanations from the theory of ethics. Which means applied ethics is rooted in moral and social ethics. But unlike the Western thought where Management Ethics is seen through the lens of the personal and religious, in India it is clearly delineated from pure Ethics.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is the most important Ancient text when it comes to Management Strategy and Ethics. Kautilya clearly separated the two. According to Gupta(1987) Dharma in the case of Arthashastra generally implies Rajadharama, which is Dharma of the leader, and not to the concept of

Dharmain toto. Which can be extended to Management as the rules pertaining to a national leader mostly applies to the corporate leader also. Rajadharma does not follow the same rules of righteousness that apply to an individual. VP Varma (1959) enumerates three meanings for Dharma in the Arthashastra: Dharmain terms of public duty, Dharmaas moral edict based on justice and truth, and Dharma as a civil law.

According to Medha Bisht (2016) while the Arthashastra focused on institutions and policies when analysing the structure and workings of the government and was secular in orientation, the Dharmashastra laid out the code of conduct and had a more religious bent.

Even though Arthais defined as wealth or assets, they are merely a means to an end. The end is Yogakshema (the good of the public). As per Gautam (2015) the leader has to formulate policies which would lead the institution to Vriddhi (prosperity) and shun those that lead to Kshaya (degeneration). Arthashastra, though the science of wealth, or in other words, economics, administration and commerce clearly considers the art of ethical behaviour.

In the long term it is imperative that not just the promoters but the other stakeholders also benefit from the organisation. Sutra 1.19.34 of Kautilya's Arthashastra maintains that in the prosperity of the citizens lie the happiness of the leader and in what is favourable to his followers lies his own benefit. What is of value to himself is not actually favourable to the leader, but what is cherished by the followers is what is beneficial to him.

And the Kural, the Tamil classic, as per Appadurai (1992) has this passage: It is analogous to attempting to preserve water in an unburned clay pot to try and advance the welfare of the institution by enriching it through deception and deceit. The water itself disappears soon.

Kautilya strongly argues for Arthabeing the most important concern, but does not forget the fact that there has to be a balance between Dharma (moral) and Kama (desires). In Arthashastra, 9.7.60, he declares that the triad of gain is, 'Material gain, spiritual welfare and pleasure'.

In the Western tradition is the societal management concept where the management strategy is basically aimed towards material success but with a pinch of corporate social responsibility thrown in at the end. In turn translating to the fact that many a time social responsibility initiatives are just a marketing effort to increase good will and performance (Copus L, et al, 2017). On the other hand in the oriental tradition all management decisions should have Dharma as the base with the Dharma regulating Artha and the

concept that Ethics brings with it prosperity (Gautam, 2015). M Hiriyanna (2013) quotes Veda Vyasa, who wrote the Mahabharata a few thousand years ago, as lamenting that he is crying himself hoarse with uplifted arms that Artha and Kama are brought to fruition by Dharma, but no one is paying attention.

Teaching Ethics in Ancient India

There were numerous texts for learning about Dharma and therefore ethics. The chief literature of the Dharmasastras, that is the science of ethics, were Apastamba Manu's Apastambasutra, Baudhayana's Baudhayanasutra, Gautama's Gautamasutra, and those written by Manu, Vasishta, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana as per Olivelle (2000). So it can be seen that there is enough literature on moral education, especially those pertaining to religious and individual morality.

As seen before in the Indian system Management Ethics and individual morality was considered in different perspectives. So while Dharmasastras taught individual morality it was the Arthashastra which was concerned with Management Ethics. In fact the Arthashastra of Kautilya has a comprehensive curriculum for the education of the leader, which includes the ethical aspects. Sutra 1.5.13-14, states that he should participate in the study of lore (Itihasa). Lore covers Puranas, Case studies (Itivritta), anecdotes (Akhyayika), examples (Udaharana), expositions on law (Dharmasastra) and treatises on assets, finance and economy (Arthashastra). The portion containing the code of conduct includes the Rajadharma. It has three segments, the rules of behaviour (Achara), criminal and civil law (Vyavhara); and expiation and punishment (Prayaschitta) (Dandekar, 1958)

The Puranas are the ancient epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. So why does Kautilya think it's important for decision-makers and leaders to understand the epics? The epics undoubtedly teach valuable moral lessons, both on an individual level and also when it comes to statecraft.

Story Telling and Dharma

Although the characters in the Mahabharata are a mix of god and human, despite being semi-fictional, it has enough logical, moral, as well as secular stances and arguments to be used as a resource for learning modern diplomacy, strategy, and ethics.

Mahabharata has Dharma running through it like a thread running through a necklace of pearls. While Mahabharata makes its hero Yudhishtira, the self-same son of Dharma (Dharmaputra), the other great epic, Ramayana, projects its protagonist, Rama, as Dharma itself in human form.

Stories and anecdotes in the Mahabharata depict how people weigh and prioritise Karma, Dharma and Artha. In the epic Yudhishtira invites other characters to rank the importance of the same. Dharma is chosen by Vidura, the common uncle. His younger brother Arjuna considers Artha to be superior. The twins, also his younger brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, recognise Artha but believe that Dharma should come first in order to obtain the Artha and Kama. Bhimash fourth brother makes a plea for Kama. All three are rejected by Yudhishtira, who prioritises self-realisation (Moksha) (Ganguli, 1953).

As a result, the epic has multiple points of view, and one of the reasons why Kautilya recommends the epics as standard literature for a well-rounded education is because each decision is explained. It is up to us to analyse the pros and cons and come to an understanding that is according to our personality and perspective. But ultimately whether it is Kama or Artha, there has to be the voice of ethics and conscience, Dharma running through it.

The most popular text from the ancient times in teaching how to deal with a dilemma vis-à-vis management ethics is the Bhagavad Gita. Although part of BheeshmaParva, the sixth of eighteen parts of Mahabharata it is a separate book by itself containing eighteen chapters (Swami Chinmayananda, 2018). The Gita starts with a scene on the battleground of Kurukshetra, where the great fight between the cousins, Pandavas and Kauravas are about to start. Arjuna who was supposed to lead the Pandava brothers in the war is feeling confused and disheartened seeing his own family, cousins and relatives arrayed to fight against him. His relative and dear friend Lord Krishna understanding his state of mind takes time off to answer all his questions, clear his doubts and motivates him to do his duty which is fight the war. This episode highlights one of the greatest ethical dilemmas a person can face in his life and through his succinct answers Krishna clearly enunciates the Rajadharma and how a person cannot afford to be emotional when faced with his duties as a leader.

Stories have been used to teach morals in many countries including India. One tale, which is quite well-known in India, teaches the important lesson that "unity is strength." In this tale, a father shows his boys how simple it is to break a single wooden stick but how challenging it is to shatter a group of them. The warlord Mori Montonari is the subject of a Japanese folktale known as the "Parable of Arrows." He gave each of his three kids an arrow and instructed them to break it as he discussed partnerships with them. He gave them some arrows in a bundle to shatter after they were successful, but they were unable to do it (McNeily, 2001). This tale can be contrasted with one found in Aesop's Fables. A father shows his

quarrelling kids the power of unity by demonstrating how simple it is to break a single stick but on the other hand how challenging it is to break a group of sticks. (Aesop, 2011)

Charles Drekmeier (1962) emphasises the similarities between the Arthasastra and Nitisastra, the book of legal science and the Panchatantra stories. He makes reference to the Arthasastra's effect on the Panchatantra, which is specifically acknowledged in the Panchatantra's opening verse. The complex concepts of statecraft in Arthasastra were turned into educational and pedagogical stories of the Panchatantra by Vishnusharman to teach his wards, the three princes how to be successful and happy in life. Themes from the Arthasastra's Niti (Justice) and Danda (Reinforcement) literature was converted into easily understood fables and parables for the prince's education. Pancha, which means five, and Tantra, which means rules of conduct or forms of activity, refer to the five qualities of knowledge, friendship, earnest effort, and prosperity creation. The Panchatantra (2013) uses kid-friendly stories, mostly involving animals, to illustrate Nitishastra (wise conduct of life).

There are detractors to the study of Panchatantra as a text of Management Ethics. As per Gautam (2015) Kautilya's Arthasastra might be a better choice for grownups and anyone with a scholarly mindset. Many of the Panchatantra's principles, while important in a management perspective, still does less to influence strategy, which is clearly conveyed in Kautilya's Arthasastra. Additionally, the Panchatantra conveys a feeling of universal applicability, particularly to the average person. Similar to the epics, the Panchatantra is more well-known today, even among young people, although the Arthasastra is still quite serious and complex.

But as Ramaranjan Mukherji (2013) writes, Panchatantra asserts that it was written with the express purpose of imparting practical wisdom to princes. This demonstrates a direct relationship between the Nitisastra and the Arthasastra. However, the Panchatantra still bears the distinct imprint of Dharmasastra, the moral code, because the stories never praise political and intellectual acumen apart from morality.

Vikram and Betal or the Vetala Panchavimshati is a series of twenty five stories which forms part of the Katha Sarit Sagara (Somadeva Bhatta, 1070) that discusses dilemmas faced by a leader. In each of these stories Betal, or the spirit of death asks a specific question to the famous king Vikramaditya that pertains to ethical and strategic decision making. These in effect are case studies couched as stories and examines in detail evidence based decision making. Though not as popular or relevant as Panchatantra as a book of morals it too has many lessons for anyone in a managerial position.

Essence of Indian Management Ethics Education

As per our research, it is clear that storytelling is a very effective way for teaching management ethics and that the Ancient Indians used it very efficiently. The essence of Indian Management Ethics Education can be summarised as follows:

1. Indian concept of Management Ethics is unique. While Management Ethics is usually an extension of Individual and Religious Ethics in many countries, in India which is clearly brought out through Arthashastra it is mainly delinked from Individual morality. In the Western concept Success comes first but in India Ethics has been front and foremost over the years in Management. It is a question of following Rajadharma than just the religious and social perspective of Dharma or ethics.
2. Ethics was taught in Ancient India through the Dharmasastras and Nitisastras. On the other hand Arthashastra teaches management that envisions success as part of Dharma. Ethics brings with it success and material welfare
3. Just giving a series of instructions on ethics will not lead to a proper understanding or acceptance of the same. It has to be analysed and registered internally. For this stories are the best method since it works on the emotions of the reader. It creates an impression in the mind that will help the manager take a decision at the time of any ethical dilemma. As we have seen earlier there are stories in the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Panchatantra that all are aimed towards teaching management ethics.

Implications for Management

If emotional stories are even better as pedagogical tools than factual case studies for teaching management subjects it is high time that we gave more importance to it in management education. New stories that will relate to the modern times which resonates with the people's ethos have to be written which will be an aid to learning management ethics. For this the Arthashastra and Panchatantra should form the model as well as the gold standard.

Stories have been used extensively by brand custodians to build brands and that too with great success. Walmart and Infosys are just but two examples where brands have been built, values instilled within the company and communicated outside using stories especially of their founders Sam Walton and N R Narayana Murthy respectively. The same principle can be used in teaching management strategy and ethics.

Stories take the listener or reader in the mental realms to the action happening and this imagination places them in a position where he feels the story. The emotional connect that can be brought into these stories will help in the subliminal seeping in of the ethical mindset into the learner. So what we suggest is that more than discussing just dry management cases or cases which analyse facts and figures the pedagogy should include management stories that have an ethical view point. These stories should be written in such a way that it is no different from an ordinary fiction which has an intriguing beginning, keeps the suspense and not only sustains the interest but builds it, ultimately culminating in a climatic end.

Conclusion

In the case of teaching management strategy today while there is a clear need for revisiting a substantial and serious manuscript like the Arthashastra and making it pertinent and contemporary, there is also a need to analyse stories like that of Panchatantra and teach them from a management perspective to the executive aspirant. It gives them a glimpse into the concept of management ethics from an Indian point of view. It is time that we come up with more stories like Vishnusharman did to make the cynical modern worker understand the need for ethics in all dealings in management.

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