

*Sapphire Newsletter* (XLRI Jamshedpur),  
Vol. 1, April 1997, pp. 3-4.

## **Ethical Orientations of Future Managers: Role of Value-Based Management Education**

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“Values are at the core of our personality, influencing the choices we make, the people we trust, the appeals we respond to, and the way we invest our time and energy. In turbulent times they can give a sense of direction amid conflicting views and demands.” Value-based education has as one of its primary goals the shaping of the value systems of students. Nothing could be more valuable to the business world than business graduates whose personal values have been given due attention by the management schools.

A value is “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.” If a person values *freedom* as an end-state of existence, it means that he or she believes that freedom is preferable to slavery. Similarly, if a person values *responsible* as a mode of conduct, it means that he or she believes that being responsible is preferable to being irresponsible.

When an individual ranks all the values along a continuum of relative importance, his or her value system is obtained. Value system provides the unique value configuration of an individual, and is the most accurate picture we can ever have of someone. The structural organization of the value system reflects the degree to which giving high priority simultaneously to different values is motivationally and practically feasible or contradictory. For example, a value system in which *ambitious* is ranked above *honest* would

indicate that the person believes that being ambitious is more important than being honest.

Value systems provide the basis for the development of individual attitudes that lead to specific decision-making behavior. Thus value systems play a major role in the ethical dimension of decision making. When clear and simple answers are not possible, managerial decision makers must ultimately be guided by their personal values and their convictions of what is right and wrong. Differences in personal value systems help explain ethical attitudes and orientations of people. Understanding value systems has been found helpful in moving beyond the rhetoric of ethical codes by developing a more coherent, deeper knowledge of the ethical orientations of individuals and how they are likely to act in situations requiring ethical judgment. Value systems are the most powerful influences on human behavior, and therefore provide the key to understanding differences in ethical orientations.

Ethics is becoming an increasingly important topic in the management of organizations today. Powerful regulatory agencies coupled with the demands of a competitive environment have made organizational ethics a vital necessity. Many of today's businesses are faced with the challenge of creating an ethical organization. Organizational ethics is the capacity of an organization to reflect on values in the corporate decision making process and establish how managers can use these observations in management of the organization. The potential benefits of an ethically oriented organization are many though often indirect.

Ethical orientation of managers is a key factor in maintaining an ethical environment within an organization. Managerial skills alone are not enough. These skills need to be coupled with integrity and ethical behavior and traits. In order to meet the goal of an ethically oriented organization, the managers of the organization must have strong ethical orientations. So, organizations

that are keen on maintaining an ethical climate need to select and train ethically oriented managers.

A society socializes individuals to value *honesty* because it is important to the society as a whole that individuals do not cheat or steal. Similarly, management schools could inculcate certain values in students that would stand them in good stead when they enter the corporate world as managers. Management schools need to give less emphasis on teaching methods and principles, and a greater focus on the value systems of students. Shaping the value systems of students would of course require efforts that are not confined to classrooms. Much more intensive socializing and interactive actions will be needed, since value-based education focuses on the whole person rather than just on disseminating conceptual knowledge.

Values are enduring beliefs, and therefore very difficult to change. One who values *obedience* is highly unlikely to start believing that it is preferable to be disobedient than be obedient. Value systems, however, can be changed with relatively greater ease. Change in value system requires rearrangement of the relative importance given to various values. For example, one who values *pleasure* more than *self-respect* could be convinced over a period of time that *self-respect* is more important than *pleasure*. The corporate world has to interact continuously with management schools in order to ensure that the value-based education provided by the latter do indeed target those values that are of utmost concern to the former.