

INNOVATION THROUGH COOPERATION

with Cases, Simulations, Games
and other Interactive Methods



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UNDERSTANDING BY ANALOGY PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD

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Abstract

The case method can play an important role in solving problems and in teaching problem-solving, as well as in initiating and managing change [WACRA, 1992]. This paper suggests that educating students through the use of the case method is not only attempting to transfer knowledge, but at the same time trying to educate individuals to become socially adjusted human beings. The following specific areas are addressed: different ways of using the case method, looking to one-self for reference, analogy allows students to better understand other students., the case study method to teach ethics, teaching ethics relate to right or wrong decisions, three definitions of error as it relates to daily decision-making, economic consequences of ethical behavior, using the case method reduces self-centeredness and balances subjective and objective factors in management decisions.

USING THE CASE METHOD TO PROMOTE SOCIALIZATION

Training students through the use of the case method is not only an attempt to transfer knowledge, but at the same time trying to help them to become social adjusted human beings. Using cases successfully requires a deliberate effort to understand the behavior of the players of the case. We understand the behavior of other persons exclusively through inference by analogy. Based on our own experience, we draw conclusions about how others might feel, think and make decisions in similar situations. Case studies achieve a learning effect by asking the student to form an opinion on the behavior of others in analogy to their own behavior. To the extent that students succeed or fail in understanding the behavior, learning will take place. This retroactive [delayed] effect is the single most important success criterion of the case study method.

The ability to act is tied to the anticipation of the action's outcome. Inability to act arises from the inability to anticipate this outcome. There are, however, situations in which the outcome cannot be sufficiently anticipated. Here, the ability to act arises by way of the institution of the conscience [..act relies on one's ethics]. To act conscientiously [ethically] then means to act in such a way as to have carefully considered everything that was there ready to be considered at the moment when it became necessary to act. This gives rise to the imperative, not to train one's conscience individually and introspectively, but rather to develop, in the course of discussion with others, parameters for consideration which adequately take subjective and objective factors into account so that one can act competently in the event of an acute demand for action - even if technical competence [information] cannot be acquired quickly enough.¹

DIFFERENT WAYS USING THE CASE METHOD

First we will consider the type of case where the students have to read a complete case. The managers have taken all decisions and the students are now asked to comment on these decisions. Case studies can be used in different ways. Many users, however, do not realize the importance of the procedure. The purpose of a case study is lost when the case is being discussed interactively between the author of the case and the person in charge of the case. A better approach would seem to be as follows: The person in charge reads the case independently. This is decidedly preferable to group work. The person in charge reflects on the problems presented and develops available alternatives. One difficulty encountered lies in fact that reading about players (of a case) is different from meeting the key players in person.

The question which arises is whether the student quickly begins to look on the players in a case as mere study objects, inferring different behavior patterns arbitrarily, like a puppeteer pulling the strings of his marionettes [puppets]. If this were so, there would be no inference relating back to the personality of the one in charge of the case, since the self-determination of the persons acting in the case is not guaranteed. If the actions of the persons [players] in the case are subject to such manipulation, then, what makes individuals different, namely their individuality, can no longer be an element of observation. This concern requires a specific positioning of the person in charge of the case with respect to his charges.

It seems to be a downright diabolical, implicit concatenation of case studies, that they do not allow the characters performing the action to be recognizable as people, but turn them into objects. If the person in charge of the case views the characters as being at his disposal, then they become his vicarious agents. This could happen as soon as the person in charge is assigned to the case. He [she] is, after all, expected to judge whether the actions described are right or wrong. The assignment itself places the actions of the persons in the case at his disposal, so to speak, and has an effect that works against facts and intuition with respect to our understanding of another person's self-determination.

Case work can thus go wrong in a big way if the procedure is not set up right. As is always the case with "sharp[-edged]" instruments, misuse cannot be completely ruled out. A knife can be used to cut bread or to kill someone. It is the user [of the knife] who determines the use of the knife, not the knife itself.²

THE REFERENCE POINT

It becomes important that the student refers back to himself. *Only then can it be expected that knowledge gained from the rightness [correctness] of certain actions is converted into knowledge of acting, of "how to act."* In 1954, Dean Dewind of Harvard University, put it this way: "The Harvard Case Method asks not how a man may be trained to know, but how a man may be trained to act."³

While studying the case alone and having the characters at his disposal, he will be only marginally concerned with himself. On the contrary, all inferences by analogy will take his own behavior as the measure for the actions of other people. He becomes the implicit center and treasure trove for all factors governing right or wrong action. This may be somewhat lessened in group work, but it changes nothing as regards the collective access to the self-determination of the people in the case and putting the behavior of others at the disposal of the group. A sort of private tribunal takes place, which judges the actions of the people in the case. Thus it is important that the case be studied alone and independently. The results that come out of this then form the initial basis for further work on the case.

Many instructors take these results to be the actual result of the case study and think they have achieved a learning effect with the student in this way. This opinion is faulty. It is now a matter of presenting and defending one's own results before the entire class. By the same token, the solutions of all class members must be presented, one after the other. None may be omitted. Now, and only now, are the proposed solutions backed up by living people. Each class member presents the solution that he himself would have lived through, there by imbuing the suggested solution with his own sense of self-determination. The ensuing discussion between the class members, moderated by the teacher, allows the person in charge of the case to move away from his central position.

The measure of all things is no longer what he had been thinking, but now there are competing ways of looking at the same behavioral problem. Suddenly, human behavior is viewed both from the outside and the inside. As a listener, I see the outside view when others are presenting their solutions for the case. If then, every participant must defend his own proposed solution in discussion, I see the view from the inside and can compare it with my own view.

ANALOGY ASSISTS STUDENTS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND OTHER STUDENTS

Inference by analogy brings the student closer to an understanding of the other student. Facts which were considered during the evaluation of the case, are judged in analogy to his own. The student begins to think things over. He begins to reconsider his own, sometimes naive, certainty of having been in possession of the right answer. To reconsider his readiness to have arrived at a decision too quickly and thus without recourse to conscience. To reconsider the values which, apart from the concrete situation of the case, have fundamentally influenced the decisions of his classmates. The elimination of self-centeredness is a requirement for becoming an ethical, socially adjusted human being.

USING THE CASE STUDY METHOD TO TEACH ETHICS

The basis of all these paradigms is the teleological nature of life's conditions. There is the always present possibility of not attaining one's goal in life. There is the fact that one does not have the means at one's disposal to ensure one's own self-preservation and the attainment of one's fundamental goals. The willingness to come to the aid of [a] threatened life is called goodwill. Hans Jonas defined the behavior of a person faced with a helpless child as a fundamental paradigm of ethical behavior. Refraining from doing harm is in this instance only one, albeit very specific, form of help.

The question is, can goodwill towards oneself be interpreted as "willingness to help?" Does help not mean essentially outside help? Helpful actions are characterized by indirectness. Help cannot and should not take [the] place [of living] of life's consummation. Its goal is rather to make this [life] possible. Life's need for help is not only determined by outside circumstances, but also in a basic way by an intrinsic deficiency arising from the lack of knowledge. Advice is one of the most important forms of "help in living." Self-advice, too, as is learning or remembering what one [is] likely to forget when under the direct, suggestive influence of the instinctive aim of behavior.

Human existence has an essentially anticipatory character, what we really are [interested in is what] still lies before us. Friends must come to our aid and we must allow ourselves to be helped in order to achieve our goals. Aristotle says: "What we are able to do with the help of our friends, we are able to do, in a certain sense, with ourselves."⁴

Only he who receives help can learn to help himself, that is, to enter into that indirect relationship to himself which is constitutive for ethical practice. Every management situation is a real help-situation. Teamwork is dedicated to help. If you need managers in the future, who are able to talk to each other, who are able to listen to the suggestions of their staff, who are able to support team-decisions, you need managers who are trained to help and who are trained in receiving help from others. Every touch of weakness which could be near [may be associated with] by the behavior of help is helpless [counterproductive] in strong [demanding] management situations. The ability to allow [accept] help is a very strong skill [represents strength] of the manager.

ETHICS EDUCATION IS RELATED TO RIGHT OR WRONG DECISIONS

Actions are a doing which can be judged from the standpoint of right or wrong. Right actions have to do with insight, wrong actions with blindness. Plato's dialogue, "Hippias Minor," demonstrates this. In this dialogue the thesis is postulated that a doctor who knowingly and intentionally causes someone to be ill is a better doctor than one who is guilty of malpractice and does harm to his patients out of ignorance. Socrates replies to this by asking whether one who intentionally lies is better than one who does so involuntarily, since it is knowledge alone that puts him in a position to choose between true and false lies.

He summarizes the essence of these reflections by saying: "It is the mark of a good man that he does wrong intentionally, whereas a base man does wrong involuntarily" [376 c].⁵

Socrates admits that he finds it difficult to accept this counter-intuitive outcome, but he does not know where the error lies. It evidently resides in the ambiguity of the word "better." In the one case, it signifies something like "more capable," "superior," and in the other, "more decent" "more ethical." It is the object of this Platonic dialogue to get at just this double meaning. If we understand it as pure equivocation, we miss the point of this dialogue. The Greek language in Plato's time had two terms for the "good:" 'Agathon' had the meaning of conductive, advantageous, worth the effort, 'Kalon,' "the beautiful," had the meaning of the ethically good.

Aristotle was the first to clarify this through objective and terminological differentiation: "In the case of art, he is to be preferred who errs voluntarily. In the case of practical wisdom or virtue, the opposite is true" [1140 b 20].⁶ The "moral" viewpoint judges an action as good or bad with respect to life as a whole, the "technical" viewpoint only with respect to the achievement of particular goals.

THREE LEVELS OF THE MEANING OF ERROR

Spaemann therefore describes three levels of meaning of the term "error":⁷

1. the "objective" error of the socially and culturally predetermined goal of action - the finis operis
2. the subjective error in the goal of the actor - the finis operantis
3. the objective-subjective error in the goal of leading a successful life.

An example of an objective goal of action would be the manufacture of a car or a bomb. A good car and a good bomb are those which best fulfill that purpose which the respective user normally associates with them. If they only fulfill the purpose inadequately or not at all, then we speak of errors. Whoever commits this objective type of error does so either intentionally or unintentionally. If he does so unintentionally, then he also commits an error subjectively, since he misses his own subjective goal of action. He also has a faulty grasp of his "art" and is in this respect worse than he who intentionally errs. He who intentionally does something badly achieves his subjective purpose by missing the objective goal.

However, we have yet a third level of meaning for "good" and "bad," or "success" and "failure," at our disposal which lets us reevaluate the intention of one who purposely does something well or poorly, right or wrong. This intention in turn can itself be good or bad. The good technician who purposely makes a bad bomb can for just this reason be better in this third sense, and the good medical student who purposely causes illness can be worse in this sense as well. Our conception of a doctor, as opposed to that of a physician, includes the intention to heal as well as medicinal ability.

In principle, a goal cannot be intentionally missed. Every intention has for its part a goal. Therefore, intentionally missing a goal has another goal as its base, which is constituted by the intention of missing the respective goal. The goal which I purposely miss simply does not happen to be my goal. Plato's thesis that no-one intentionally does wrong denotes first of all the purely formal circumstance that no-one can intentionally act contrary to the basic structure of intentionality without nullifying the active character of his action. The idea is that it is impossible not to want to achieve the goal of a successful life. There is no motive which could move us in this direction, since even if something should bring us to give up all other goals, then this Something would obviously form an essential part of that which we consider to be a successful life.

These three levels of meaning of error hold [are true] for every day human decisions. Instruction using cases and the discussion of the cases in the plenum [group or plenary session] inevitably bring about a discussion of all three meanings. That is why these discussions have a meaningful retroactive effect on the student and on the position he] takes for himself. It is highly probable that he will leave all self-centeredness behind him and thus become capable of ethical action.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF ETHICAL ACTIONS

The author⁸ was able to show that ethical action in management also has an economic effect, incidentally so to speak. Company profits are maintained more lastingly and more effectively through

ethical actions. It makes no difference whether the action is directed towards customers or employees. Companies are the platform for human contact, externally as well as internally. Profit is not the result of technical processes, but a result of human action on this platform. Money is not earned through the technical process of a bank transfer, but through the intention of the person ordering the transfer to be effected. How I act towards him is the decisive question regarding the increase or decrease of profits. Behavior such as this is nearly always described in opportunistic or utilitarian terms. But these modes of calculating demand a high cost in terms of information and controlling. In addition, they lead to a relatively low level of emotional acceptance on the part of the "target person."

THE CASE METHOD REDUCES SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Ethical behavior is not built on calculation, but on one's own inner convictions. The will to put whatever quality one can into one's own work and to work to raise this level of quality is not done with one eye on the customer, but is rather a question of how one sees oneself. Leaving the evaluation of this quality up to the customer is hazardous, but precisely the step needed for leaving the position of self-centeredness. Living together in management situations partakes of this quality and benefits decisively from ethical action. This is also true in a very general sense, by the way. Life is reflexive. Only as something which is aware of itself can life be successful. And the perception of the conditions necessary for a successful life must be aware of itself as the most important of these conditions. This means, however, that the condition can only be perceived when it has already been fulfilled and vice versa: when it is fulfilled, it has already been perceived.

This perception can be the outcome of a training course, for example, which is initially heteronomous. In this instance, we speak of "education." At the end of the road [the ultimate achievement] is the ability to live consciously. Since ancient times this has been called "virtue." Only a life consciously lived can, according to the teachings of the great philosophers, be considered successful. It is a noble task for the instructor to let this help reach the student. Help in the sense of head-on instruction amounts to the speaker presenting his own way of consummating [living] his life. All the student can do is to try to emulate this.

Case studies have this consummation of life already within them. The class discussions will develop according to how successful this is. They [students] will then balance subjective and objective factors. This reflecting on oneself and concomitant leaving behind of self-centeredness is a high, qualitative result of instruction using case studies.

"To act free, is to take possession of oneself ..."⁹

ENDNOTES

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