

Are we as ethical as we think?

Report summary

May 2011



THE
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TANK

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Are we as ethical as we think?



One of the first things worth noticing about this debate is the poll results. At the beginning each participant rated themselves on a scale of 1-5 how ethical they judge themselves to be. The weighted average was 4.4 at the beginning of the discussion but only 3.7 by the end. As a main premise of Bazerman and Tenbrunsel's recent book "*Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It*" is the tendency to turn a blind eye to our own failures to be ethical (like the mice on the right), it seems that The Thinking Tank helped to raise consciousness.

It's a good start.

And some of the well supported statements in our last 5 minutes are a good finish:

- *When I tell my wife what I was doing all this time on my pc I shall answer, I was working on how to make the world a little better*
- *Thank you very much- I think we learned quite a lot due to our anonymous discussion*

What we need to be ethical

We generally agreed that ethics were necessary and standards should be met. But how? The 2 strongest statements in the debate were both about what support we need to be ethical:

- *A clear set of values*
- *Having the guts to risk being unpopular / sacked, having a greater purpose*

We also agreed (like Barry Schwartz on [TED](#)) that actions speak louder than words:

- *It is not about the word but more about the behaviour*
- *Yes, bringing ethics into everyday life and conversation is a great idea. It cannot be left in theory-land*
- *Ethics is not just a philosophical concept, it is a day to day issue to discuss and bring to life*
- *It is not sustainable for us to all behave selfishly (often the opposite to ethically). In the end we all suffer*

The actions that the group supported most strongly are:

- *I will live and act more closely to my set of values*
- *I must be on the alert watching the public discussion on ethics, including the role of the churches and our politicians, discussing these items with my family and children*
- *[I can] speak up if I notice unethical behaviour*

The ethical problem

It is not always possible to have a frank discussion, particularly about a subject ethical behaviour when political correctness and peer pressure abound. Thanks to the anonymity of The Thinking Tank however this is the one time you can say the unsayable with no fear of retribution. That can really loosen up the debate and improve the quality of interaction.

Although as a group we found it easier to criticise others (eg child abusers, politicians, high profile business fraudsters) than analyse our own shortfalls, there were some personal admissions:

- *So easy to lose touch with reality and believe in your own version of the universe*
- *The same thing happens with retail discounters when they mistreat their employees but you still go there shopping almost every day*

The most common feelings from behaviour falling short of our own ethical standards is guilt

- *Feel like I let myself and others down. That I was not enough.*
- *Feel like I just learnt something and will avoid that mistake next time*

- *Turning a blind eye is easy in the short term but hard to live with in the long term. I feel like a coward*

Dynamics of the group

The group hit a high level of consensus (40% vs Thinking Tank benchmark of 29%) and were slightly more engaged in the topic than average (measured by activity level). The average support for each idea was 33% with 29 statements achieving majority support (listed below)

Top statements (ranked strongest first)

- *Maybe it is not about the word but more about the behaviour*
Elaborates on: I'm going to experiment with using the E word more often and see how it goes down
- *Support by clear set of values*
- *Support: having the guts to risk being unpopular / sacked, having a greater purpose*
- *Live and act more closely to my set of values*
- *Being still on the alert watching the public discussion on ethics, including the role of the churches and our politicians, discussing these items with my family and children*
- *Yes, bringing ethics into everyday life and conversation is a great idea. It cannot be left in theory-land*
Elaborates on: being still on the alert watching the public discussion on ethics, including the role of the churches and our

politicians, discussing these items with my family and children

- *Ethics is not just a philosophical concept, it is a day to day issue to discuss and bring to life*
Elaborates on: live and act more closely to my set of values
- *If you are a politician, dealing with your annual budget and are aware of the needs to get re-elected for a new term but disregarding this you do quite a lot for long-term sustainability*
- *Personal eg: when I stood up in a conference and denounced racist presentation. Felt like I had to do it (but the hideous silence that was the group reaction was not easy to live through)*
- *Personal example: approaching a man in the street who was attacking his girlfriend. Scary but necessary. Especially as I had a carful of 15 year old girls and wanted to set a good example for them*
- *We need to secure a place for ethics in our workplaces, institutions and daily lives*
- *It is not sustainable for us to all behave selfishly (often the opposite to ethically). In the end we all suffer*
- *Support: an understanding / awareness of the bigger picture*
- *Leaders. Well we have a clear case in NY jail. That was a leader who totally forgot to connect ethically with the world and felt he could just do everything*
- *So easy to lose touch with reality and believe in your own version of the universe*

Elaborates on: leaders. Well we have a clear case in NY jail.. that was a leader who totally forgot to connect ethically with the world and felt he could just do everything

- *Compliance initiatives can promote unethical behaviour*
- *Wrong church leaders not intervening in child abuse*
- *This matters a lot to me. I am very uncomfortable with unethical behaviour and don't mind speaking up even when that gets me into trouble.*

The Thinking Tank is an independent not for profit place to encourage meaningful conversation that might contribute to social and human progress.

The Thinking Tank has a dream. That one day its transparent aggregation of views will be a quotable source. A counterbalance to the spin and hype and extrapolation of the sample of one.

The Thinking Tank uses Synthetron's crowdsourcing technology (which also powers Neil Gaught & Associates LikeMIND™), to combine dispersed wisdom and find the strongest opinions and ideas on any topic.

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