Measuring Ethical Climate in an Organization:

Aligning for Excellence

K. T. Connor, PhD
Center for Applied AxioMetrics
320 Moss Oak Lane
Saint Simons Island, GA 31522
912-634-1302
ktconnor@thinkingpattern.com

Although the history of economic progress is rich with stories of fraud and dastardly dealings, today public sensitivity to them is more fine-tuned than ever. Ordinary citizens watch their stock funds crumble as a result of duplicitous corporate decisions. To add to the awareness-producing, the media continues to headline corporate fraud and deceit. Words like “Enron,” “WorldCom,” “Merrill Lynch,” “Tyco” have become code words for “crisis in ethics.” Congressmen labor to pass back-breaking auditing laws that serve to ease their previously lax monitoring, but create consternation. Companies establish ethics officers to communicate to the rest of the community that they are upright and above board. And the bad news continues. So frequent have the newcomers in fraud become that we risk becoming oblivious to them, considering them normalcy.

The time is ripe, it seems, to address more vigorously and more deeply than ever before, the issue of organizational ethics. Vigor, it may be objected, is already present in the pressures placed on companies by such forces as Sarbanes-Oxley or the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, all compliance focused. But that is only one aspect of the ethical landscape. This article asserts that ethics is a complex concept, and one-dimensional fixes, while perhaps better than evasion of the issue, are not adequate. More than compliance measures are required. Moreover, as the individual in the bowels of the organization know only too well, espousing an ethical stance by management does not guarantee that the rest of the organization—or even management—is in alignment with that stance.
Alignment is a critical variable in the ethics equation. The above-mentioned Federal Sentencing guidelines require “Due diligence and the promotion of an organizational culture that encourages ethical conduct.” That is, a culture in alignment with the ethical standards of the organization.

What I offer here is a model of organizational alignment based on Robert S. Hartman’s contributions to formal axiology and Wayne Carpenter’s extensions of that science. I feel formal axiology, and the metrics that have been developed in conjunction with it, grace us with a unique way to address both the complexity of the notion of ethics, and the gaps in ethical alignment present in an organization. Only when we have a rigorous measure in which to determine the gaps to be closed, can we hope to see prompt effective, efficient action that supports ethical healing in our organizations.

The format of this article is simple. I will first review the basic understandings of axiology and axiometrics, then position the metrics in the context of conventional psychometrics. Following a brief discussion of the axiological ethics model, I will discuss preliminary findings from organizational alignment research, proposing areas for further study.

WHAT IS AXIOLOGY?

Etymologically, axiology is the study of value. Early uses of the word were often applied to objects, indicating the “worth” of the object. That use of the term appears even today, loosely applied to tactics for evaluating such things as stock market picks, real estate, and even marriage partners. Philosophers have explored many different dimensions of what they called value theory, using such delineations as “instrumental vs. intrinsic worth,” “basic values and derived values,” or the value analyses of specific persons and things. Hierarchies of values have been proposed, though measures to support the rankings were usually weak or absent.

Positivists found the reach beyond relative dimensions of value practically meaningless, given the multiplicity of values. Others sought to propose an arbitrary hierarchy of these particular values and equate this with goodness. G.E. Moore launched a strong critique of many of these philosophical approaches, espousing instead a “metaethics” that raised itself above particular values.

Moore’s struggle to understand the good was the stimulus for Robert S. Hartman to merge a desire to clarify Moore’s insights with his own life’s mission: to understand how to “engineer good” the way Hitler’s regime engineered evil. (Hartman had been a
For Hartman, value science up to that point was not a universal science. He noted that the “rules” for Kantian ethics cannot be used to draw inferences within Spinoza’s system and vice versa, however much either system be tightly reasoned. There was need, suggested Hartman, for a system that was not dependent on relative interpretations of what “good” was in a given situation. Hartman saw the need for the kind of universal language and norm as existed in sciences such as physics.

Hartman’s axiology, captured clearly in his Structure of Value (1967), posits a universal norm of human valuing based on the axiom that something which possesses more positive qualities is better than that which possesses fewer. Extrapolating from this basic notion is the tripartite model of value that forms the basis of Hartman’s formal axiology. Hartman distinguished value as being of three kinds, Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Systemic. These levels are defined in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intrinsic Value:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Personal or spiritual value; defined by an infinite number of properties or value, which can be valued in an infinite number of ways.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Extrinsic Value:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Practical or situational value; defined by finite, descriptive properties which can be compared in an infinite number of ways.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Systemic Value:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual or theoretical value; defined by a finite number of properties</td>
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These three dimensions are not foreign to philosophical thought, and are even reflected, if crudely, in other’s views of ethics. They correspond somewhat, for example, with the classical threesome of beauty, truth, and wisdom. The founder of the Institute for Global Ethics, Rushmore Kidder, mirrors this triad more closely, speaking of ethics in terms of care-based, ends-based, and rule-based principles (1995, 2005). Others have recognized similar correspondences with our way of seeing the world. Consider the ubiquitous “people, task and system” taxonomy of organization specialists.
What Hartman achieved was to provide the meta-system to explain the internally consistent and universally valid relationships among these dimensions. His formal axiology explains not only particular values, but also all values and all value systems. It is, in effect, a consistent, logical, mathematics for all thinking and all thought systems.

Hartman reasoned that previous treatments of ethics were one of two things: either they equated ethics with definitions, such as “a theory of human conduct” or “a doctrine of choice,” or they were about the writings of individual philosophers.

The first alternative leads to the confusion created by the multiple interpretations of what is meant by such things as “right choice” or “proper human conduct.” The second alternative leads to the question of which philosophy is best. To respond to both dilemmas, a formal theory of value theory is required. It is this theory, based on the universal language of mathematics, that Hartman developed for us.

WHAT IS AXIOMETRICS?

Hartman’s work was not complete when he died in 1973, but it didn’t remain undeveloped. It was taken and extended by a student of Hartman’s at the University of Tennessee. Hartman was primarily interested in developing a formal theory. The student, Wayne Carpenter, was to take that theory and refine its measurement, producing instruments that have been used over the past 30 years to measure, objectively and specifically, people’s thinking and deciding capacities.

Carpenter had been commissioned, while at Fort Benning during the Viet Nam era, to develop a command decision manual for helicopter decision making simulation. In researching the various decision theories over the centuries, Carpenter realized that what the great thinkers were describing as decision theory, was in direct harmony with what Hartman had been exploring in his development of formal axiology. What had been seen as the interesting explorations of one of his professors took on new weight for Carpenter in his immersion into human decision-making. Stimulated by the applicability of what Hartman had theorized, Carpenter decided then to devote his life to working with Hartman and his theory.

Hartman’s death in 1973 prevented Carpenter from working directly with Hartman. Hartman’s widow, however, gave to Carpenter her husband’s profile interpretation notes. From that time on, Carpenter’s focus has been on developing, validating, and extending Hartman’s work. This was the beginning of the steady process of building a solid system of axiological measurement that continues to this day.
The result of Carpenter’s work is a measurement system which has captured the unique decision pattern of individuals to a degree not possible with conventional self-report assessments. From that axiometric system, Carpenter has produced analyses of thinking and decision making competencies which focus not only on how people think and value, but on what they value. It is both of these, and especially the latter, that has provided the rich resource for the subject of this paper, the analysis of ethical alignment.

HOW DOES THIS CLARIFY OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ETHICS?

**Axiology and Ethics:** Using Hartman’s basic axiological relationships, it is possible to see axiology as contributing a universal system for understanding any concept. Hartman himself was particularly interested in ethics, which he described as “the intrinsic valuation of the individual person.” As such it is more valuable than aesthetics (“the intrinsic valuation of the individual thing”), sociology (the extrinsic valuation of groups of persons”) and economics (“the extrinsic valuation of the individual thing”). This is because intrinsic valuation is more valuable than extrinsic valuation, which is more valuable than systemic valuation. For Hartman people were more valuable than things, which were more valuable than rules, though all three were important to a complete valuation of the world.

Hartman’s formal theory met the challenge of measuring intangibles by delineating the order in our valuing processes. From this he built a framework for calculating the clarity and focus of our thinking. By examining the attention paid to specific items in a ranking relationship, and matching that against the norm, Hartman identified the actual pattern of valuing which a person used. This is the legacy upon which Carpenter built. This is especially relevant to our interest in ethics. Carpenter has been able to take the concept of ethics and find an objective way to measure that concept’s structure, as well as the individual’s potential for translating those concepts into ethical action.

**Axiometrics and Ethics:** In the realm of axiometrics, human beings are seen to experience reality and make decisions through all three valuation filters, with varying degrees of clarity. Moreover they focus on all three kinds of realities, systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic, to varying degrees. As they process these realities, they tend to focus their decision making on what we might refer to as three kinds of thinking:

- **Intuitive thinking (Intrinsic):** focus on the uniqueness of the person or thing, accepting it in its uniqueness without analyzing or critiquing
- **Pragmatic thinking (Extrinsic):** focus on the properties, steps, and parts of something in the context of its environment
- **Conceptual thinking (Systemic):** focus on rules, order and meaning, on system, structure, and goals.
While there are classes of objects proper to these three kinds of thinking, all classes can be experienced through each of the forms of valuation.

The proper object of intrinsic thinking is people, yet it is possible to perceive a glass of water intrinsically. A good instance of this would be the case of someone who had been deprived of water for a long period of time, as in being stranded in a desert. That water would have a uniqueness and a singular value to that person, inviting an immediate connection.

The proper object of extrinsic thinking is usually physical objects. Yet it is possible to approach a person extrinsically, focusing mainly on their status or usefulness. I might, on the other hand, see a rule or procedure (properly a systemic object) extrinsically, emphasizing the impact it can have in achieving a result, or the reward that will accrue if I follow it.

The proper object of systemic thinking is concepts, rules, systems, or order. Yet I can see people as concepts, or as meeting or not meeting my standards, thus experiencing them systemically.

Using this logic, axiometrics enables us to build measures that tap the structure of a person’s notion of ethics.

Intrinsic thinking about ethics focuses on the personal ethics: on personal conscience, an individual's sense of responsibility, and personal integrity.

The extrinsic dimension focuses on practical ethics. It involves seeing oneself as responsible for the common welfare, as willing to do what is required to carry out good deeds, and as feeling an obligation to do good.

Systemic thinking about ethics is all about moral code. It speaks of respect for rules, compliance with regulations, and clarity of ethical principles.

In other words, axiometrics provides us with an assessment not only of a person’s thinking process (how they think), but of the structure of their very concepts (what they think).

It does this in a way quite different from conventional psychometrics.

**Conventional psychometrics** uses inductive reasoning in reaching its conclusions about the variables measured.

**Measuring Capacities:** For instance, in devising a personality assessment, a common practice is to collect self-report data on individuals, then factor analyze the data. Those items that cluster around a specific factor are named according to the general configuration of that cluster and are considered a unit. The reality of the cluster rests solely on the fact that the items within the cluster correlated with one another, not that they were organically connected to each other.
Measuring Values: In measuring one’s value system using psychometrics, a common practice is to ask the person to agree or disagree with various statements describing value positions. These items are then grouped together into more general variables which are then identified as the value structure of the individual. Again, the inductive process is employed.

Axiometric measurement, on the other hand is deductive. Rather than reasoning from a body of specifics to a general cluster, axiometrics identifies a general norm and deduces the specific correlates. In this case the general mathematical norm is that discovered by Hartman and validated again and again by Carpenter.

Measuring Capacities: Individuals are not asked to describe themselves or to agree with statements. They are asked to complete a mental task, and the pattern they use to complete that task is recorded. Their thinking patterns are then matched against the universal norm. From the unique deviations that occur around that norm, tightly reasoned conclusions are reached about that person’s intuitive, pragmatic, and conceptual capacities.

Measuring Values: A parallel process is used to identify the structure of a person’s thinking content as well. Individuals are asked to perform an actual valuing task involving ethical dimensions. Again, their patterns of valuing are measured against the mathematical norm to determine what they do and do not pay attention to in their valuing.

The measurement of the structure of value concepts is especially cogent in the analysis of ethical climate. Measuring ability to think, while important, is not enough. Ethical behavior is less a function of a person’s thinking capacity as it is a function of their ability to integrate the structure of their value concepts into that thinking capacity. The brightest people can still be capable of fraud and deceit.

On an organizational level, the most well-crafted vision statements regarding ethics could be crafted in all sincerity, yet never be reflected in organizational action. As Stuart Gilbert of the Ethics Resource Center in Washington states it, "at Enron, ethics was simply a piece of paper with three Ps -- print, post [in the company lunch room], and then pray that something is actually going to happen." This can be said of many other organizations as well.

In analyzing and building an ethical organizational culture, it is imperative to identify the particular valuing process that people use to make decisions, that is, the quality of their decision making and problem solving ability. It is equally important, if not more so, to identify the actual structure of their value concepts, the content of their thinking about values. It is this latter which informs their decisions. Even the most capable problem
solvers with faulty attention to the correct value structure can fail to act ethically when required.

This, of course is a sensitive area. Values are not only personal; at times they expose one to possible judgment if revealed. Moreover, some people are clearer than others about what values they actually hold, or how to label them. Thus direct query about a person’s values may not yield total accuracy, a fact which renders self-report assessment of values less than optimal. What is required is a way to objectively track a person’s valuing process, and to capture the structure of their value system objectively.

Axiometric measurement affords this objectivity. Rather than agree or disagree (or check or leave blank) items representing values, in axiometric systems the respondent completes an actual valuing exercise. The structure of what is paid attention to and the value it is given is then recorded. This provides the integrated picture of the content of that person’s value system.

**HOW DOES THIS CLARIFY ETHICAL CULTURE ANALYSES?**

An organization’s culture is its system of values and beliefs. It can be revealed in the behavior of its members or citizens, but this is not guaranteed. As has already been noted, espoused values are not always those that are lived. Social psychological research alone is a testament to this fact. Note the volume of research studies that have been devoted to the attitude-behavior link.

**Measuring Capacities:** What axiometrics provides for us is a clear, precise measure of the degree to which a person is susceptible to making a bad decision. This risk can be of three kinds. First, there can be a lack of capacity to effectively make decisions, that is, to identify problems, alternatives, and solutions. Second, there can be the risk of making poor judgments more often than good ones. Third, there can be the lack of capacity to translate values and beliefs into action.

All these can be measured axiometrically. With axiometric methodology, Carpenter states, “An individual is determined to be at risk (to be susceptible) in specific situations and under certain conditions. What we are after is the definition and measure of just those conditions and situations which put a person at risk and why in fact that risk exists.” (1991)

**Measuring Value:** In addition to measuring the degree to which the values-behavior gap will be bridged, Carpenter’s work allows us to determine the nature of the culture in which the person finds himself, and the gaps that exist therein.
Considering vision to be the concept of what **should** be, and reality the perception of what **is**, gap analysis poses several questions:

- Does the leadership group in the organization have a clear vision as to what ethics is, and does this match their perception of the reality in their organization?
- Do the employees have a clear picture of what the vision is, and does this match their perception of the reality?
- Does the leadership vision match the employee’s vision?
- Do they see the same reality?

Gaps in these areas clearly put an organization at risk where ethical behavior is concerned. Those charged with the task of understanding business ethics can play a particularly valuable role in helping organizations clearly see the gaps, and see the serious implications of such gaps.

**The Measurement Methodology:** The questions raised are important because they involve intangibles, and are often misaddressed. Asking outright questions about value and belief is at best risky business. Especially in today’s organizational environment, charged as it is with external and internal pressures to comply and to be “politically correct.” Pressure to present oneself in a particular light abound. Axiometric methodology allows us to address these questions objectively, by crafting measures to capture the decision making of the organization **in process**, not by post-decision report. The tactic is not “how do you make these decisions?” but “let’s see you make these decisions.” This is admittedly a different kind of query than the common value lists and questions used conventionally in value surveys. But it is an important kind of question if we wish to precisely and objectively capture a complete picture of the person’s decision basis without the risk of self-presentation bias.

Three kinds of assessment are generally being used in organizations today: 360° feedback assessments, self-report assessments, and assessment centers. The first records the alleged view of others about a person, the second captures the alleged self view, and the third, because it has the individual actually behave, strives to capture the actual competency. Axiometric measurement is more akin to the last, though far less time consuming and far less expensive than assessment centers. It merely asks a person to do a mental task and then tracks the process used to do that task. The pattern is then related to the mathematical norm, and clear, consistent corollaries are drawn.

The statements used are carefully drawn up or items are identified according to a rigorous adherence to the axiometric logic. Rankings of these items and/or statements are once again matched against the rankings in the universal norm and patterns noted. This is a clearly efficient and effective way to measure decision making in process. Results of this measurement include not only what a person is paying attention to and to what degree of focus, but also what they are **not** paying attention to, what is “not even on their radar.
screen.” It should be apparent that, in fully analyzing an organization’s value culture, the inattention variable would be an important variable.

**The Measurement Outcomes:** The dimensions of ethics measured correspond to the three axiological dimensions mentioned above. Axiometrics measures the degree of similarity individuals in the organization display with regard to their attention to and clarity of the following variables:

Intrinsically: ability to see oneself as capable of both good and bad, ability to weigh both good and bad and see good as better, ability to identify oneself with and commit oneself to the good,

Extrinsically: ability to take responsibility for the good in others, ability to take the actions required to achieve good results, ability to sense an obligation to take good action

Systemically: ability to respect rules and codes, ability to determine good code from bad, ability to clearly understand moral code.

Each of these components is analyzed according to its three-fold constitution, and strict logical corollaries are drawn.

**Validation of the Model and Methodology:** It is not the purpose of this paper to provide an extensive analysis of the validation process for this model. Validation studies have been conducted over the past 30 years, involving academics from such institutions as Vanderbilt, Princeton, University of Chicago, Yale, and Harvard. It has been validated for organizational use according to EEOC Guidelines, showing no significant differences due to race, age, or gender. Moreover, the methodology has been reviewed and approved internally by the legal and psychometric departments of such companies as Arthur Anderson, Drake Beam Morin, GTE, Sara Lee, and Hospital Corporation of America. A copy of the validation studies for the Hartman mathematical norm and for the constructs generated in the axiometric reports is available on Wayne Carpenter’s web site: [http://axiometricsinternational.com](http://axiometricsinternational.com). A summary of the internal reviews is available on the CFAAM web site: [http://cfaam.org](http://cfaam.org).

**PRELIMINARY ORGANIZATIONAL DATA:**

Consistent with the spirit of this paper, which is an introductory review of a model and methodology, the preliminary research data that follows is heuristic, not definitive. I offer such data as a taste of what is possible if organizational ethics is more fully researched this way.

**The Sample:** The data is based on a sample of top managers and 70 employees in a small processing company. The employees ranged from line workers, maintenance crews, transportation crew, their group leaders, and office staff. The data was collected for the purpose of stimulating discussion about corporate culture in the context of a Total...
Quality Management intervention. Thus, in the analyses that follow, only general conclusions will be discussed.

**Management Vision vs. Reality:** One analysis involved the degree of congruence between the manager’s vision of the organization and their perception of how this vision was being carried out. Identification of this kind of gap is important for several reasons.

First, organizational stress is created when what is desired is perceived to be absent. This has two possible effects: it can create motivation for change, or, if strong enough, can debilitate or burn out. This analysis can indicate the potential for one or the other, as well as suggest areas of ready motivation to be tapped for improvement.

Second, many managers are not clear as to what their actual vision for an organization is. Often vision statements reflect this in the innocuous expression they are given in official “vision statements” and in the half-hearted effort that is put into creating them.

A general graph of the data shows the following, where the percentage score represents those in the sample who felt that the dimension to the left was an essential element in the culture of the organization:

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Management Vision</th>
<th>Management Perceived Reality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Ethics</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Ethics</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Code</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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It can be seen from this sample of managers that less than half felt that conscience should be an essential factor in creating an ethical environment. Yet when these same people were asked in a Likert type scale if it was essential, almost all of them agreed that it was.

Were they lying? We don’t know. Bias in response can be either conscious or unconscious and a question like that asked directly might set up an automatic bias response. Moreover, it is possible, as indicated earlier, that the managers had never before reflected on whether or not they saw conscience and personal ethics as critical to an ethical culture.

What we do know is that when they were given a value task to perform, the ethical items representing intrinsic value received very little attention. It is also instructive to notice
that their perception of what actually existed (Reality) was even less intrinsically focused than what they thought should exist (Vision). As a group, not one saw the current situation as characterized by focus on conscience and personal responsibility.

As low as the Personal Ethics percent is, the perception of what exists is even lower, producing the organizational stress mentioned above. As low as the expectation is that personal ethics should be essential, the managers perceive it to be even less important than it should be.

Findings such as this suggest fertile ground for discussion and organizational transformation potential. In addition to these findings, a deeper analysis of the axiometric data reveals that for the managers, conscience was less important than either practical ethics or moral code. An intriguing point of discussion in all this is that formal axiology defines ethics as the intrinsic valuation of the person. If conscience is overlooked, management is left with sanction-based governing, or worse. If the personal ethics is left out of one’s concept of an ethical culture, the ethical environment is out of balance and dependent upon external forces for its motivation.

Other stress points that show up in the data are those between management’s vision of practical ethics and moral code. It is clear from the data that in the managers’ view there is more emphasis on practical ethics than should exist. The same is true of moral code.

**Employee Vision vs. Reality:** When we look at the responses of the employees, however, we see some interesting differences.

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<th></th>
<th>Employees Vision</th>
<th>Employees Perceived Reality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Ethics</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Ethics</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Code</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>95%</td>
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Most employees don’t feel conscience has a key role in organizational ethics at all, and furthermore, don’t see it in action, either. Most employees feel that emphasis is overwhelmingly on moral code, though half feel ethical actions are still characteristic of the ethical environment. Only half think moral code should be an emphasis, while the majority, but only a slight majority, indicate that ethics involves doing the right thing. Less than this, though still more than half, perceive this carried out in the organization.
Management vs. Employee Comparison: When the two sets of data are viewed side by side, more intriguing comparisons are seen.

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<th>Management</th>
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<th>Employees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Ethics</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
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<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral Code</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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The differences between Management and Employee vision show up clearly here when it comes to conscience or personal ethics. Management is more focused on the importance of conscience than the employees are. A look further into the data indicates that the employees felt overwhelmed by the emphasis on rules and compliance, and felt that their own sense of what was right was not going to be taken into account at all. What this data shows, even as primitive as it is, is that they were incorrect in their assumption. Moreover, discussion of the data in team meetings with management verified that fact.

Both groups saw a heavy emphasis on rules and procedures, but neither group was in total agreement that this should be the emphasis. This is one of those areas where fruitful problem solving can take place. There is internal stress in both groups, in that fewer people think it should be an emphasis there than think it exists. The gap is highest for the employee group, which could suggest skepticism about doing anything to balance the emphasis. But it is possible that the stress will create enough motivation for productive discussion and development to take place.

When the data is analyzed more specifically and some of the logical relationships are drawn, additional differences exist. For example, both Management and Employees felt that an ethical environment required them to guard against unfairness and fraud, but only the Employees were sensitive to lack of accountability. It was not a factor in the Management vision of ethics at all. Discussion of these results yielded some fascinating insights into the belief system of the organization, including the conviction on the part of the employees that management looked the other way when employees were lax at work or failed to comply with procedures. This factor would probably not have surfaced in the discussion of one of the more conventional self-report climate assessments, for it requires an analysis of what is not attended to, and asking the question about it creates attention.
IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL AND THE PRELIMINARY DATA

It must be stressed again that the data is preliminary. There is a serious need for the collection and analysis of further data using this methodology, followed by rigorous statistical analysis. Most of the work that has been done so far is proprietary analysis done for specific organizations and, while subjected to the rigors of axiometric validity, has not been published as a stimulus for further research. In fact, the methodology up to this point has been in the hands of a small army of consultants who have been more concerned with building their business on it than furthering research. The time to correct that emphasis is now. Hence this invitation to become partners in bursting wide open the potential of axiometric methodology for analyzing the ethical temperature of organizations objectively and honestly, the better to propose ways to strengthen them.

Research Hypotheses: The studies done so far suggest several intriguing research questions:

- What is the relationship between personality variables and ethical stance?
- How does ethical stance affect leadership style?
- How does ethical stance differ in organizations with widely different missions?
- What is the impact of ethical stance upon productivity?

This last question is an especially intriguing one. We are told by numerous sources that an ethical organization is a more productive one. Is that wishful thinking or solid fact? The studies that have been done are often simply correlations of degree of compliance measures with productivity measures. If an ideal ethical climate involves all three dimensions of value, how does this play out in actual organizations? What is the impact when the intrinsic is overemphasized, as many idealistic human-relations-centered models might encourage? What is the impact with the main emphasis is only on “the greater benefit for the greater good,” a solid extrinsic dimension? What are we missing with the current overemphasis on moral code?

Areas of Applied Science: Research possibilities are not the only area to benefit from attention to axiometric methodology. If our organizations are to become the ethically strong organizations our culture claims it desires, changes must be made. Several areas of organizational transformation suggest themselves:

The research so far shows that it is possible to discover, in an objective way, where the gaps exist between leadership’s thinking and the thinking of the rest of the organization. Discovering these gaps leads to fruitful problem solving around how to address and close
them. Fact finding is a prerequisite for effective problem solving. This methodology offers a splendid way to make the “soft” side of business ethics tangible and “hard.”

The research so far shows that leadership is not always aware of what the rest of the organization thinks. This process gives leadership a quick, accurate way to check vision alignment and to discover not only what the rest of the organization thinks, but to clarify their own thinking. Do they really intend to discount practical ethics, or personal ethics? Are they satisfied that they don’t see more attention given to guarding against irresponsible behavior? Where are they assuming the followers are following when actually they are not? And what needs to be done to communicate better in order to create alignment?

The research so far reveals that leadership can be viewed with skepticism when such skepticism is not warranted, such as when employees see less attention to personal ethics than management actually possesses. Findings such as this can help to create an organization where morale problems are reduced because there is increased understanding among the levels. Behavior is not revealing of a person’s thinking in every instance, though it is always consistent with it. As different parts of an organization understand the others’ thinking, misinterpretations of behavior can be reduced and collaboration increased.

CONCLUSION

Why is it important to consider axiometrics as a key to greater understanding of organizational ethics? For three kinds of reasons. Intrinsically, if we are truly interested in building an ethical culture, it is important to help individuals in organizations, both leader level and below, understand accurately the vision and perception of everyone in the organization and assist them in closing the gaps to understanding. Extrinsic, until a complete, realistic picture of the organization is determined, problem solvers will be apt to address the wrong problems, and efforts to impact culture change will fall short. Systemically, compliance with regulations is important. But compliance without surveillance will only be achieved when a complete view of the ethical life of the organization is presented.

This paper is an attempt to introduce a methodology and model that has been quietly operative for more than 30 years, in organizations around the country and abroad. It is my conviction that it can provide both rich research potential and effective intervention impact in an era that is crying for both. This is especially true of organizations undergoing a “crisis of ethics”--and those organizations which are wise enough to seek to avoid such a crisis. Hopefully the kind of thinking expressed here will contribute to both dimensions.
REFERENCES


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K.T. Connor

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