

Adding Ethical Value

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"Adding value" is part of our business jargon. All processes and personnel are subjected to the bottom line question: what value is being added here? If you are not adding value, you're gone.

Fair enough. Business is not sustainable if it is required to carry personnel, or perpetuate processes, that add no value. It makes sense to push this sort of evaluation back into the whole organization and not leave the business value assessment to the marketing department alone.

Business Value. Profit is the most recognizable business value. Increasing shareholder value is the usual bottom line. And yet, such measurable financial value depends on successful pursuit of other business values such as innovation, quality, and service. Successful business transactions are also dependent on trust and trustworthiness.

Technological Value. As technology invades and transforms all aspects of business, it brings with it its own specific values. Technology values rationality (suppressing or replacing irrational, traditional approaches). It values the measurable and quantifiable over the non-quantifiable and qualitative. Technology values power, speed, effectiveness, efficiency, replicability, normalcy, and predictability. It tends to privilege the artificial over the natural.

Ethical Value. It is the task of ethical leadership to ensure that ethical values are put "on the table" alongside business and technology values as company policy is set and strategic decisions are made. Ethics should not be reduced to an exercise in damage control at the end of a chain of events gone awry.

What are these ethical values? For Christians, the "will of God," the justice, righteousness, truth, and compassion of Jesus Christ, and even the "glory of God" represent bottom line ethical values. But Christians know further that God's will and purpose is expressed in the two grand themes of creation and redemption. Thus, authentic ethical values protect and nurture God's creation (above all people made in God's image and likeness). Truly ethical values heal and set free---rather than inflict harm or threaten hurt.

So let's seek business value---and respect technological value---but always try to keep human, ethical value in the driver's seat. The task of ethics is not just to resolve thorny crises and dilemmas but to "salt" and "light" the fundamental values shaping the corporate culture.