

Morality Works?

“Ethical business”, “Corporate Social Responsibility”, “Ethical investment” - many would say “this all sounds like a good thing, but how do we equate it with the need to make money?”

MoralityWorks is an exploration, which goes deeper in order to deliver real value, and deep value; making Morality profitable for a business to engage in.

Asked for Values gets things like:

“Honesty, Integrity, Equality, Ingenuity, Quality, ...”

Single words. We can agree them because we all have our own version of what they mean. On Ethics we get one line Statements:

“Fair rewards for all

Equality of opportunity for all our stakeholders

Customer led, ethically guided”

With a some creative writing everyone is moderately happy.

On Morality, the hesitation reveals the uncertainty.

“What would you say are the Morality issues for your company?” - silence.

Maybe: “What are the Moral Contradictions in your business?”

Going Deeper

There were Morality Plays in earlier centuries. You may also know of a book by Pirsig, called “Lila, an Enquiry into Morals”.

These suggest that to deal with Morality we have to go much deeper. To find the “Contradictions” we engage in stories, small plays, some theatre.

But we need a process that can help us deal with Contradictions at different levels, and engage in creative and analytical thinking to resolve difficult issues.

The Process

The attitude needed for Innovation is: “There are many solutions”

A complex system will always have sub-components (subsystems) and overarching contexts (supersystems). And supersystems may have their own supersystems, and subsystems there own subsystems.

A physical example: A feather is a subsystem of a bird, and the bird is a subsystem of the flock, and the flock is a subsystem of a food chain and so on.

A market is a supersystem of a company, the company is a supersystem of an office.

Great innovations are found by solving a problem at a different level.

If the problem you face is the need for more office accommodation then this is solved at cost, you just buy more accommodation, but a better solution is to solve it at another level. So one solution at the subsystem level is to take the components (e.g. people) and change their office need (e.g. they work from home). Or you solve it at the supersystem level, changing the business so it needs less accommodation (contracting out certain parts or operations of the business).

Both the solutions can be cost free or even cost reducing - here the reduced travel for staff is a cost saving.

Morality?

All companies face some Moral Contradictions. Maybe concern about staff safety. But with more CCTV cameras you face a problem over trust, independence, freedom.

Dealing with a Moral Dilemma at one level only will cost, and the cost will be a compromise with benefit, and may create an additional moral dilemma. The answer lies in exploring the dilemmas at different levels of the system, subsystem and supersystem, seeking solutions which have no compromises - even no cost?

How would this be done?

The process starts with the creation of Morality Plays. These help everyone explore the intricacies of the Moral Dilemmas, enable people to visualise the events in detail, asking questions about details and helping everyone understand the complexities.

Next comes idea generation, idea evaluation and selection, requiring a revisit to the Morality Plays to see if anything has been missed, to solve the Moral Dilemmas and not create new ones. The process is iterative, and the outcome unknown, but that is the nature of all deep level innovation. The initial experiments look promising. People have engaged, people have had ideas, which solve the original contradictions.

We want to move this into the business world, and that is what MoralityWorks intends to do.

If this is of interest, whatever field you are in, do contact us. We don't wish to do this on our own.