

Some Ethical Issues Concerning the Employee Loyalty toward a Co-Worker and Group within Organizations

Vicențiu Buzduga *

Abstract: This article aims to analyze the utility of loyalty in organizations, and to locate employee loyalty at the level of the group. There are some questions about the terminology, the coverage of the 'loyalty' idea, the possibility of it to be inversely proportional to integrity, so it could be a professional imperfection, precisely to those lacking empowerment, just a means of control of the ones in lower positions.

Keywords: ethics, loyalty, integrity, virtue, employee, organization

The *Nicomachean Ethics* presents the object of ethics as a normative measure in the application of virtues. The moral virtue - *ἀρετή* – is approached in relation with the intellectual virtue; it represents the median path between excess and insufficiency (Aristotle 1106 b), the 'just measure', a voluntary act controlled by practical wisdom - *φρόνησις*. It is in the field of evidence that the authentic virtue does not support degrees of intensity; it is or not (honesty, truthfulness, integrity, and so on).

The organizational climate allowed the ethical phenomenon to emerge in the form of an induced pretext, in the environment of dehumanizing standardized social game of a mask - *πρόσωπον*. The 'social being by its nature' no longer pursues the realization of the good of being a fortress of moral rectitude and implicitly the attainment of *εὐδαιμονία*, but the satisfaction of immediate needs, dictated by pride and instinct. In such a precarious field, it was possible to make changes as regards the ethical values by reducing the significance or the association, thus resulting in supposedly ethical principles, with degrees of intensity, which eventually are difficult to measure. An example would be loyalty that has not been yet assigned a commonly accepted definition and a unanimously accepted

* Vicențiu Buzduga (✉)
Independent Scholar, Iași, Romania
e-mail: vicentiu.buzduga@gmail.com

operationalization; and, more, a validated tool for its detection and measurement has not been found.

At first glance, loyalty in the organizational environment could be understood as a composite term, a sum of attitudes (not aptitudes) and beliefs, usually oriented toward a person (mostly with a higher rank) or a group.

Unlike authentic virtues, loyalty arises from the need of belonging, also from the sense of insecurity. It is connected to a desire of being lain in an environment that can contribute to the satisfaction of one's own becoming. It resets the relationship with human priorities and values (there are predispositions to renounce at least to integrity and honesty), and creates some addiction, placing itself between identification (translated by membership) and the risk of losing life (in extreme forms of participation).

When loyalty is fleetingly manifested, by a minimum intensity, it may lead to a good reputation (Copp 2006). It covers meanings from the sphere of devotion and promotion of the values of an organization. Loyalty appears like a feature of team consolidation (implicitly the employee retention phenomenon), in the proximity of honesty, pride of belonging and identification with the group, truthfulness, lack of counterproductive behaviors, etc. Some rewards become expected (Furnham and Taylor 2004) and there is the satisfaction of an evolutionary path in the organization. At this moment, charismatic leaders are those who might offer motivation, which is necessary in case of diminishing the sense of duty as virtue.

At an average intensity, loyalty sometimes „replaces” competence; there is a restriction of liberties (only freedom within the organization remains) and one can observe the disappearance of the authentic ethical values, the first one being integrity.

At the highest levels of loyalty, one can observe manifestations such as fanaticism, antisocial behavior and irrationality.

Beyond all, over time a serious problem comes to the fore in many situations, namely a decreasing concern of people within an organization “in order *to build* on loyalty and commitment”, actually a sort of “individual infidelity to the employer” that causes damages to the organization, finally. That's why especially managers and human resources specialists have to find appropriate means to deal with, to avoid “worst excesses and manage disloyalty when it does occur, without it becoming a virus spreading through the rest of the

organization and possibly destroying it” (Furnham and Taylor 2004, 3).

Deeming the significance of integrity at the workplace (and not only there!), which is the moral and ethical hallmark of any employee, the interest goes to a vital relation to be scrutinized as regards integrity and loyalty within organization.

So, it remains to be analyzed if there is a reverse proportionality between loyalty and integrity: the increase in loyalty seems to occur in terms of a decrease in the possibility of preserving integrity.

It would be interesting to measure how much there is a need of loyalty for those in empowerment positions. Unlike loyalty, integrity is measurable and sufficient in fulfilling daily responsibilities in the organization, and the great quality of integrity is that it cannot degenerate into reprehensible situations for the employee or society.

There are several terms that frequently and erroneously overlap with loyalty, such as adherence, fidelity, preference (towards a brand, ideology, organizational culture), etc.

We think that we should ask ourselves whether loyalty (frequently, among those in lower positions) is an ethical virtue, as long as it does not benefit constantly from a supportive *φρόνησις*. Perforce we can ask ourselves how much the loyalty exceeds the job description, and what is the role of loyalty while the employees are doing a job for which they are paid.

A major question claims to be emphasized herein: the moral competence. Being a very complicated topic – on which we are not settling for the instance -, moral competence is worth to be continuously developed as the ground for the general effort of human fulfillment as an individual and a team member alike. And this, even though it does not simultaneously attract more virtues, each of them needing to be separately cultivated (Van Luijk and Dubbink 2011, 14).

Undoubtedly, there is certain inertia in acquiring moral values and principles. The ability to absorb them and to prove an ethical behavior depends on the psychological disposition and strength of each individual, on education, on professional training, no less on the clarity of the ethical codes’ formulation in companies and, above all, on the process of internalizing standards of these guides of conduct.

Teams in organizations are difficult to be crystallized and they are often exposed to sabotage, labor migration, counterproductive behaviors, and so on.

Perhaps, the biggest problem in detecting and measuring loyalty – that makes our interest - is the lack of an instrument in the sphere of cognitive psychology that would operate with undetectable items (in a conscious and immediate way) by measuring behavioral indicators. Current tests, which measure ethical virtues, are built on ‘easy-to-anticipate answer’ questions by the employee. A possible solution, would be to create a test (with changeable geometric shapes and colors) applicable from the hiring phase, doubled by the recording of psycho-biometric parameters, to measure the response to changes - whereas, a loyal person manifests some resistance to change.

Loyalty is still in its early stages of definition and quantification. The subsequent studies and technological developments will provide in the near future some responses to the ethical crisis the worldwide organizations have to manage in nowadays.

REFERENCES:

- Aristotle. 1988. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Stella Petecel. Bucharest: Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House.
- Copp, David (ed.). 2006. *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Furnham, Adrian and John Taylor. 2004. *The Dark Side of Behaviour at Work: Understanding and avoiding employees leaving, thieving and deceiving*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Luijk, Henk and Wim Dubbink. 2011. Moral Competence. In *European Business Ethics Casebook: The Morality of Corporate Decision Making*, eds. Wim Dubbink, Luc van Liedekerke, Henk van Luijk, 11-18. Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York: Springer.