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Welcome to the Winter Edition of *Australian Ethics*!

Winter has well and truly come, and I hope everyone is keeping as warm and dry as possible.

Thanks go once again to Charmayne Highfield for preparing a terrific read in this latest edition of *Australian Ethics*, covering themes of change and navigating competing interests. I kick things off by reflecting on the tendency we have when confronted with political or ethical concerns to fix one area by appealing for change in another. Next, Peter Davson-Galle interrogates the issues thrown up by religious education, exploring the vexing tension between parents' religious freedoms of action, and children's freedoms of religious thought. Tanya Stephens draws out the differences between business and professional ethics in the context of veterinarians, arguing that for the professional, the customer isn't always right.

Anticipating our conference theme, leadership is also a focus. Howard Harris reflects on recent publications on ethical leadership, showing the practical and conceptual complexities arising here. On a more practical note, the AAPAE is supporting the next generation of ethical leaders through sponsoring the Ethics Olympiad in 2022. In June, I was fortunate to watch high schoolers from across Australasia engaging in quality ethical discussion in the Olympiad. It was exciting to see a focus on listening and charity rather than winning and point-scoring, and I encourage anybody interested to find out more (see p.6).

Perhaps most importantly, this edition provides the latest details on our 2022 conference, being run by Jacqui Boaks and the team at Curtin University School of Management & Marketing. The topic is *Ethics in Management: Business and the Professions*, providing a great opportunity to think through some of the thorny challenges and inspirational possibilities that arise for managers and leaders alike. There are few areas of our world, in business, the professions, government and civil society, where managers and leaders do not play an important role—for good or ill—in ethical conduct and practice. Once again, the conference will be held over Zoom, and I'm looking forward to (virtually) see everyone there, and exploring this challenging topic with you all! **Hugh**



## 29th ANNUAL AAPAE CONFERENCE

### Wednesday 7 - Friday 9 September 2022

An on-line conference hosted by The School of Management and Marketing,  
Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia

#### CONFERENCE THEME

## ETHICS IN MANAGEMENT: Business and the Professions

Management and leadership roles in business and the professions entail a wide range of ethical issues and challenges. These are apparent to anyone occupying such roles, aspiring to them, or subject to decisions and actions by managers and leaders. Their effects on our daily lives are unavoidable and wide-ranging, never more so than in times of flux and crisis. In addition to ethical challenges particular to management and leadership roles, there are many more general questions, such as:

- Are management and leadership ethically special in some way?
- Is ethics for leaders and managers the same as for other people?
- Does being a manager or leader present ethical challenges that are different in kind from other aspects of daily life, or are the impacts of leaders' and managers' decisions simply greater?
- Are such challenges analogous to the ethical issues and questions faced in the professions generally?
- What do we have a right to expect of leaders and managers regarding ethics?

The 2022 Conference will focus on these questions, although papers exploring other aspects of the Association's area of focus will also be very welcome.

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

The Conference Committee invites submissions from individuals and teams working in any discipline or profession interested in advancing the understanding, teaching, and practice of professional and applied ethics. Although priority will be accorded to papers focused on this year's theme, works in adjacent fields will also be considered. As always, the conference will provide a collegial and encouraging atmosphere for new researchers and seasoned presenters to showcase their work. Abstracts of ~250 words should be emailed to: [curtinAAPAE2022conference@curtin.edu.au](mailto:curtinAAPAE2022conference@curtin.edu.au)

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**Non-concessional: A\$30**

**Students: A\$25**

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

### ***The ethics of the COVID-19 public health response—lockdowns, mask mandates, vaccine requirements and other public health and social measures***



**Dr Andrew (Andy) Robertson** is the Chief Health Officer and Assistant Director General in the Public and Aboriginal Health Division of the Western Australia Department of Health. With specialist qualifications in Public Health Medicine and Medical Administration, he served with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) from 1984 until 2003, including completing three tours to Iraq as a Biological Weapons Chief Inspector with the United Nations Special Commission in 1996 and 1997. He remains in the RAN's Active Reserve and was promoted to Commodore undertaking the role of Director General Navy Health Reserves from July 2015 until December 2019.

In October 2003, he took up the position of the Director, Disaster Preparedness and Management in WA Health. In December 2004, he led the Australian Medical Relief team into the Maldives post tsunami, managed WA Health's response to the 2005 Bali Bombing, led the WA Health team into Indonesia after the Yogyakarta earthquakes in June 2006, worked as the Radiation Health Adviser to the Australian Embassy after the Fukushima nuclear incident in 2011 and conducted the AUSMAT needs assessment in Nepal after the Nepal earthquake in 2015. Since 2008, as Director, Disaster Management and Deputy Chief Health Officer, he has coordinated the WA Health disaster and public health responses to the Ashmore Reef incident, the H1N1 2009 pandemic, the 2011 CHOGM meeting and the 2015 Ebola preparations, and acted as the Chief Information Officer and the Chief Medical Officer. He has been undertaking the current role since June 2018, including leading the WA Health response to the COVID-19 outbreak.



### ***Ethics in management and business: What future for stakeholder theory?***

**Michelle Greenwood** is Associate Professor in the Department of Management at Monash University. Her research area, broadly speaking, is critical business ethics. In this context she has developed critical and ethical approaches to a number of distinct areas: ethics and HRM (critiquing ideology and consensus in HRM); stakeholder theory (developing critical and relational understandings of stakeholder theory); CSR (developing political approaches to nexus of CSR and employment); and corporate accountability (analysing CSR reporting and visual rhetoric in corporate reports). She also has an ongoing interest in publication ethics. Currently Michelle is co-guest editing special issues on "Work and Freedom in the 21st Century" at Human Relations and "Intimate Partner Violence and Business" at Journal of Business Ethics. She has held editorial positions at Journal of Business Ethics, Business and Society and Business Ethics Quarterly and serves as co-editor-in-chief for Journal of Business Ethics.

## PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITY

Authors of papers presented at the conference will be invited to submit completed papers to the AAPAE's associated journal, ***Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*** (REIO). REIO is a peer reviewed journal and all papers go through a rigorous double-blind review process to determine suitability for publication. Please note submission for review prior to the conference does not guarantee acceptance for publication.

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## THERE'S A HOLE IN THE POLITY, DEAR LIZA...

Hugh Breakey

In my experience, when we're thinking about public policy and social issues in one area, there's a tendency to appeal to change in other areas to fix the issue worrying us. I have a colleague working in the public policy area, who wryly observes that in an extended public discussion of almost any social issue, it is only a matter of time before someone says that the whole problem could be fixed if only we could get education right. I think a similar observation could be made today about getting organisational culture right.

The regularity with which this phenomenon of let's-fix-one-area-by-fixing-another occurs can be a bit frustrating, and there are problems with it—as I'll discuss below. However, there are reasons it is a sensible approach, and often worth pursuing.

First, institutional interrelations are critical. How people operate in one area can be strongly influenced by how things work in another area. For example, having a free and strong media environment helps keep politicians accountable. Thus, one of the best responses to fixing political corruption is to ensure the protection and sustainability of an entirely different profession: journalism.

This was one of the key insights of the Fitzgerald reforms in Queensland in the 1990s. Rather than fixing corruption through building a single, all-powerful anti-corruption agency, Fitzgerald's reforms successfully created an overall system of public and private institutions that worked as a resilient interlinked whole to thwart large-scale corruption. This interlinked complex came to be known (as Transparency International termed it) as an 'integrity system' (Sampford, Smith & Brown, 2005).

While this was a novel approach to tackling twentieth century corruption regimes, the idea of mutual-

ly checking institutions is not new. The central insight of the 'separation of powers' is that spreading power, authority and accountability across institutions can empower and encourage each of them to resist the other when it oversteps its bounds. The separation of powers doesn't prevent conspiracies from happening—but it forces those conspiracies to operate across multiple institutions with different agendas, mandates, and personnel, making them inherently unstable (Breakey, 2014).

Ultimately, we need to be aware of the larger institutional system as we advocate for reform, and both the challenges and opportunities it offers.

The second reason appeal to other areas and institutions is sensible is because decision-makers respond to an array of different motivations when they act. Decision-makers respond to laws, rules and regulations—and the compliance and enforcement regimes surrounding these. They respond to economic incentives and risks. They respond to institutional culture and local expectations about the way things are done. They re-

spond on the basis of their capabilities and skills (sometimes shaped through available technology), and their confidence in using these capabilities. They respond with an eye to institutional rewards, especially in approval, status and reputation. And they respond on the basis of their ethical values and virtues. Some of these influences are very local—they might refer to a specific organisation, or even a single department or team within that organisation. Equally though, some of these influences are profoundly shaped by other institutions and practices, meaning that a change in those might lead to a desirable shift in behaviour.

As such, it is often the case that to fix a problem in A, we need to look to B.

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Equally though, there are traps in looking too swiftly to other policy domains to fix a problem.

One trap is that we may not be aware of the difficulties in creating reform in another domain, and of that reform being effective. Looking at a new policy domain from an outside perspective, it seems to me there is often a ‘grass is always greener’ phenomenon. To the newcomer’s eye, it is often easy to presume that various reforms will be relatively straightforward. But constructive reform of any area is never easy. For one thing, institutions are populated with fallible, diverse and (at least somewhat) self-interested people, who have their own agendas and power bases, and will appraise any given reform on those bases. For another, if the institution is functioning at all well, then even morally principled and professionally committed decision-makers will be wary about any disruptive change that may impact on the institution’s performance.

I think this is often why public discussions of a policy area lead over time to appeals to changing culture or ensuring better education. The more enquiry into a given policy area we do, the more we realise how many impediments there are to change in that area. When we look to a new area (e.g., culture, education), we think that change there will be easier than change in the original domain—failing to realise the same types of institutional momentum will resist reform there as well.

A second trap is that we forget that the new domain we are appealing to is itself interconnected with everything else. Reform on it may be impossible or ineffective because of its placement in a larger socio-political context—and therefore to all the institutions around it. To me, it sometimes feels like the song: ‘There’s a hole in the bucket, dear Liza.’ The line of thought runs like this: We need better policy. We would have better policy if governments attended more closely to the will of the people. Governments would attend to the will of the people if the people were informed and less parochial. People would be informed and less parochial if they were

better educated. People would be better educated if there was better schooling and education systems. Schooling would be better if there was greater parental support for children, and more respect for the importance of education and moral development. All these would be better if our overall social culture was better. The culture would be better if our economy didn’t encourage and reward short-sighted materialist preferences. Our economy could work better if it was better regulated. For that to happen, we need better policy. And we could get better policy if governments attended more closely to the will of the people...

And round and round it goes...

In this way we realise that to really fix Problem Area A, we need first to attend to B. But then we realise that fixing B requires contributions from C, and so on all the way until we cycle back to the need to fix Problem Area A.

What’s the practical takeaway here? I think we need to acknowledge that the embedding of institutions within larger organisational complexes and cultures creates what can be profound and frustrating resistance to reform, where it feels like nothing can be fixed until everything is. At the same time however, those larger organisational complexes are often doing a lot of good: many of them are the results of successful reform of generations past aiming to fix problems that bedevilled past polities. Many of those past problems are no longer as visible, precisely because programs against them were ultimately effective.

Ultimately, we need to be aware of the larger institutional system as we advocate for reform, and both the challenges and opportunities it offers.

### **Dr Hugh Breakey**

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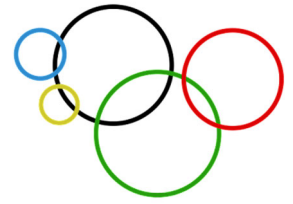
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**References:** Please contact the author direct for a list of references.

## ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ETHICAL LEADERS

THE ETHICS OLYMPIAD

We are delighted to announce that the AAPAE has joined other sponsors supporting the **Ethics Olympiad**. The Ethics Olympiad has a vast network of participating schools throughout Australasia. There are currently over 500 schools participating annually in Ethics Olympiads that provide students with the opportunity to develop philosophical skills and understanding. The Ethics Olympiads serve as a vehicle for schools to promote and instil the epistemic virtues characterised by the spirit of open questioning. Students learn how to think and not simply what to think. The Ethics Olympiad conduct events that bring school teams together to engage each other through a collaborative approach to philosophical discourse that promotes the development of interpersonal skills and virtues. The very skills needed in rational discussion and argument for civic participation throughout their developing lives. Visit: <https://ethicsolympiad.yahoosites.com/>



## MATHEMATICS AND ETHICS

While codes of ethics are familiar in fields like engineering, computer science and artificial intelligence, the mathematics profession has generally lacked them. Although mathematics societies have internal codes of conduct, there has been little discussion of the wider ethical impact of mathematical modelling and algorithms. A preliminary examination of the topic appears in the arXiv preprint: D. Müller, M. Chiodo and J. Franklin, A Hippocratic Oath for mathematicians? Mapping the landscape of ethics in mathematics (<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2112.07025>).

In Dec 2021 James Franklin spoke on 'Quantification in ethics' in the University of Central Florida's Ethical-Speaking Series. The talk dealt with such topics as environmental accounting and the use of QALYs in health care allocation. A video of the talk is available at: <https://youtu.be/UkZLj1h-BdE>

In a recent article in the *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 'Let no-one ignorant of geometry...': Mathematical parallels for understanding the objectivity of ethics (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10790-021-09831-z>), James Franklin argues that both mathematics and ethics establish absolutely certain truths. It opposes the theory of Justin Clarke-Doane's book, *Morality and Mathematics*, that neither mathematics nor ethics contain certain truths.

James Franklin's book, *The Worth of Persons: The Foundation of Ethics* will be published by Encounter Books in October 2022 (<https://www.encounterbooks.com/authors/james-franklin/>).

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them to act against students' education in any sense that involves developing open minds. As Aristotle observed: 'It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it'. The religiously indoctrinated are obviously not meant to be entertaining the thought of atheism, just rejecting it. Less ob-

viously, they are also not meant to be entertaining the thought of theism, just accepting it.

A bill defending students' freedom of religious thought would be welcome but the previously proposed one does not do that. As it stands, it is more an exercise in supporting the suppression of it; I suggest that such a bill is condoning something legitimately

describable as the intellectual abuse of children.

**Mr Peter Davson-Galle**

Email: [p.davsongalle@utas.edu.au](mailto:p.davsongalle@utas.edu.au)  
 Peter Davson-Galle is a retired academic. His discipline is (analytic) philosophy and a sub-discipline is philosophy of education. A publication relevant to the above is: *Reason and Professional Ethics*, Ashgate, 2009.

**References:** Please contact the author direct for a list of references.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND EDUCATION

Peter Davson-Galle

**B**riefly put: I (morally) support religious freedom (as an instance of broader intellectual and cultural freedom) but the previously proposed federal religious discrimination bill doesn't in one fundamental way. Thus I oppose that bill. The trouble lies in its support for religious schools and their role in suppressing the religious freedom of their students.

### *In more detail:*

One source of support for the religious freedom bill is a concern to have religious schools free to ensure that staff are committed to schools' aims to have their students' school experiences promote religious belief (as "taught" by formal instruction and/or "caught" by immersion in a school ethos). Sometimes it is noted that having parental religious belief reinforced and developed by the school is a primary reason for some parents choosing such a school and it is further claimed that parents have the moral right to be free to choose that for their children.

Religious freedom includes freedom of thought, of speech and of action. Of these, the core freedom is that of thought. Why? Unless one's views have been freely arrived at, any speech or action in expression of them is but the following of an internal script not of one's own devising. If a school attempts to instil or reinforce

religious belief, then it is not championing students' religious freedom of thought but helping to suppress it. Of course any such exercise of attempted prevention of freedom of religious thought might fail (some of those who exit religious schools do so as atheists) but to note that is hardly to have a legitimate response to my point. One way of fostering students'

### **As Aristotle observed:**

*It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.*

freedom of religious thought would be to reserve some "religious studies" curriculum time for the exploration of the philosophical arguments for and against belief in various varieties of supposed gods. And, to foster balance in those discussions, it would seem a bad idea for the teachers involved to all be believers. Religious freedom of students' thought more dictates staff variety than staff uniformity. Better for such freedom that a range of ideas concerning religious topics be presented to students in as unloaded a way as possible with students' education including training in the skills of critical thought to assist their appraisal of reasons for

and against such ideas. To adapt Socrates's words: the unexamined thought seems not worth having, at least on important matters (which I assume religion is taken to be).

But what of parents' (moral, as distinct from legal) rights? I agree that to allow parents to attempt to indoctrinate their children (via schooling) into having, or reinforcing, some religious belief is indeed allowing parents freedom to act in accordance with their religious beliefs. The decision is, then, between rival religious freedoms: parents' freedom of religious action versus students'/children's freedom of religious thought. A case in favour of the parents might be able to be made but it is not made by generic reference to religious freedom. I doubt that such a case can be successfully advanced but, given space constraints, can but suggest here that children are not property and that, if the parents in question have been themselves indoctrinated by their own parents' crafting of them, then it is questionable if their indoctrinative tendencies towards their own children is an exercise of their freedom of action as opposed to them merely acting in compliance with an imposed script.

For schools to engage in attempted indoctrination, even at the behest of parents, is for

*(Continued on page 6)*

## LEADERSHIP IN A PANDEMIC – RESPONSIBLE OR TOXIC?

Howard Harris

This is a review of *Debating Bad Leadership* (Palgrave 2021), a collection of essays edited by Anders Örténblad. After I had read the book my attention was drawn to a recent article that looks at the way leaders have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The article, *The Fault Lines of Leadership: Lessons from the Global Covid-19 Crisis*, is written by Thomas Maak, Nicola M. Pless and Franz Wohlgezogen and published in the *Journal of Change Management*.

Bad or toxic leadership is not only an academic interest, it is a real problem, it is in the world. The book and the article come together on this point and in their analysis of the challenges facing leaders. Örténblad writes of the dangers that follow when “leaders are given opportunities to see too much to their own interests, at the expense of the humans they lead and the organisations they are employed by” (Öp30)\*, while for Maak, Pless and Wohlgezogen “many leaders have... engaged in acts of selfish, destructive and outright ‘toxic leadership’ (Padilla et al., 2007), to the detriment of a great many people around the world” (Mp67).

Örténblad’s main concern is why there are so many bad leaders, hence his sub-title, *Reasons and Remedies*, and the book takes the form of a debate, with many reasons advanced as to why bad leadership is so widespread. The essays in the collection explore the extensive range of views

thrown up by the phrase ‘bad leadership’. The book contains 20 chapters, with a total of 30 authors from institutions in 10 countries. The contributors between them give 24 reasons for the prevalence of bad leaders. These reasons, and much else of the work, is summarised in a useful table included in the introductory chapter.

Bad leadership, toxic leadership and narcissism are not synonymous, although many contributors to the Örténblad book seem to treat bad leadership and toxicity as the same. Maak, Pless and Wohlgezogen equate narcissism and the “dark side” of leadership (Mp68). The distinction between “the Good, the Bad, and the Evil” is considered in the book using a 2x2 matrix in which the axes are the effectiveness of the leadership assessed in terms of how well predefined outcomes are achieved (the functional or task dimension) and the relational or moral dimension, “how the group is actually conducted in achieving the goal” (Öp54). Bad leadership on this account includes not only leadership which fails on both dimensions but also leadership which might be moral but is ineffective on the task dimension.

Perhaps the most threatening parts of the book are those that deal with “Dark Leadership”, the label introduced by Wood, Meister, and Liu to distinguish leadership which fails on both the functionality and morality aspects. It is both ineffective and immoral

(Öp55), leadership that is hard to label any way other than ‘bad’.

Bad leaders have been with us for millennia, with some extending the horizon to the Biblical King David and beyond (Öp87). While Maak, Pless and Wohlgezogen focus on the existence of fault lines and crises as the precipitator of bad leadership, the contributors to Örténblad’s book include such mundane circumstances as the difficulty in dismissing leaders (Öp28) and the shortage of candidates (Öp25).

Political leaders provide examples for both book and article. I was not sure what to make of the political focus. Might it be that political leaders face greater challenges, or that their actions are more widely publicised? Those in the book cover a longer time span than those in the article which are necessarily limited to the contemporary Covid-19 pandemic. Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and Donald Trump in the US are introduced as exemplars of Dark Leadership to help readers understand the concept in Örténblad’s book (Öp59). The book’s index confirms the political focus with entries for Idi Amin, Bolsonaro, Churchill, Chavez, (Hillary) Clinton, Gandhi, Hitler, (Boris) Johnson, Kim Jong Un, Mandela, Mao, Mugabe, Modi, Obama, Pol Pot, Thatcher and Trump. Trump and Bolsonaro are examples in the Maak, Pless and Wohlgezogen article, where their narcissistic approach to leadership is contrasted with the com-

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passion of Jacinta Ardern and Angela Merkel (Mp71). Although the book notes that there “is some evidence suggesting that women are more likely to be effective political leaders” and that “women are less prone to a range of ethical failures” (Öp94) the one example of a woman in leadership discussed in any detail in the book is Hillary Clinton (Öp57), who is described as an “ineffectual leader” (Öp56).

### **Ethics and Dark leadership**

Of particular interest to those readers who are interested in ethics will be the definition of ‘bad’ that the authors use. Early on, in the chapter devoted to definitions (Öch3), Wood, Meister and Liu not only explain why shared definitions are necessary for fruitful discourse, but also engage with the multiple meanings of ‘bad’ and ‘good’. They distinguish between the functional and moral aspects of good and bad in the evaluation of performance. Using the 2x2 matrix mentioned above, they show how these evaluations can be at odds. A functionally good leader, effectively achieving goals, might be assessed as ‘bad’ when the focus is on the moral aspect of leadership.

A utilitarian ethic pervades much of the analysis. Leaders are assessed on the nature of their consequences (Öp6), on their achievement of “desired performance levels” (Öp176) or on whether their followers give up on them (Öp176). At times it seems

that some authors take the view that leadership is an exercise in what you can get away with, on avoiding being caught; an idea some see going back at least to Plato and Gyges (Republic 2:359), or to King David (Öp87).

## **Bad or toxic leadership is not only an academic interest, it is a real problem, it is in the world.**

Notwithstanding the definitions of good and bad provided in the book, I was left with some disquiet as to what bad leadership is—that may, of course, be a consequence of my commitment to the importance of virtue in management. The book seems to accept the view that leadership is bad if goals or performance targets are not met. I think that would make Gandhi a bad leader as he was opposed to partition and partition happened. Perhaps that is the book’s point, and the purpose of the table with its 24 explanations for the frequent occurrence of bad leaders (Öp26). Leadership is complex, success is multi-faceted, and the book does nothing to hide that, providing an extensive debate on the nature of leadership, and on the ethical question of what it means to be bad. The same point can be found in the journal article, where it is the complexity of the fault lines that calls forth the greatest challenges.

Debating Bad Leadership is a useful book, challenging established norms about bad leadership, mov-

ing the focus from individuals and possible therapeutic actions to broader questions about good and bad, about leadership itself and about the variety of roles and activities that expect there to be a leader.

For those interested in leadership ethics, it will encourage debate, and it is not overburdened with ethical or philosophical theory. It may “make the world a better place”, as the editor hopes (Öpx).

### **A/Prof Howard Harris**

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A longer review of Örtenblad’s book is scheduled to appear in a forthcoming volume of *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*.

\*References are to the book (Öpn) or to the article (Mpn).

Örtenblad, A. (Ed.) (2021). *Debating Bad Leadership: Reasons and Remedies*. Cham CH: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maak, T., Pless, N. M., & Wohlgezogen, F. (2021). The Fault Lines of Leadership: Lessons from the Global Covid-19 Crisis. *Journal of Change Management*, 21(1), 66-86. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2021.1861724



## **A A P A E L i s t s e r v**

If you have any information or notices that you would like us to relay to your peers, please email your request (word format) to: info@aapae.org.au **The AAPAE’s Listserv has over 700 subscribers locally and overseas.**

## THE CUSTOMER ISN'T ALWAYS RIGHT: WHY BUSINESS ETHICS IS NOT PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Tanya Stephens

It has been said that the way to grow a veterinary practice is to give the customer what they want. However, do veterinarians have customers and is this really the way to go? Is emphasising a business agenda rather than professionalism the reason for the discussion around veterinarians becoming unaffordable, and concerns about over-diagnosis and over-servicing?

As companion animal ownership in particular has increased in economic value (the rise of the 'fur baby') and given the preponderance of veterinarians working in small practices and the rise of corporatisation, there has been a promotion of veterinary practice as a business. This has inevitably led to tension between the priorities of veterinary professionalism and those of a business agenda. Business ethics (if indeed there is any such thing) is not professional ethics.

While business strives to provide customers with what they want, a profession will aim to provide what is right and appropriate, not what is requested or demanded. For veterinarians who have as their first priority the care of the animal, this priority can bring them into conflict with economic interests or the interests of the animal's owner.

The standards and ethics of a good business leader may not be the same as those of a good professional. For example, finding a competitive advantage in the market may involve outmanoeuvring

the opposition. Good professionals on the other hand will act in a way as to achieve what is in their clients' and patients' best interest.

A social contract is said to be at the heart of the professional relationship in that 'in exchange for the statutory restriction of (certain acts) to the profession (members of the profession) must act in the interests of society and its members'. If the views of clients differ too much from practising veterinarians, this may ultimately lead the public to question if the veterinary profession is maintaining its side of the social contract.

### Business ethics?

The idea of business ethics is fairly recent, most likely in response to scandals. Some firms have adopted business ethics programs whilst others maintain that there is no distinct business ethics and that the ethical principles applied elsewhere in society should apply equally to business.

The relationship between ethical behaviour in business and profit has been well researched and the evidence is less than clear. There is of course evidence that good ethics is good for business. Three reasons as to why good ethics might pay are trust, focus and culture.

### What is a profession?

'A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely

recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others' (Australian Council of Professions, 1997).

However, we need to be aware that the views of professionalism by veterinarians may change over time. New students have been shown to have a 'naive view' of professionalism where attributes such as altruism and social justice are highly ranked. As they progress through their training and into the profession these idealistic tendencies give way to more practical concepts such as professional autonomy, commercialisation and lifestyle ethic!

In addition, traditionally, the veterinarian as a sole practitioner had only to consider their relationship with clients and society. Today, many veterinarians are employed by Government, corporations or larger practices which makes balanced decision-making in the context of a social contract of professional practice more complex and demanding. A profession-organisation conflict. An individual who is a member of a profession and an employee, director or manager in an organisation, has an identity as a member of their profession and another identity as a member of the organisation. This becomes compli-



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cated if the organisation and profession have values and beliefs that are not congruent.

Other factors that impact veterinary professional ethics include corporatisation, paying incentives, pet insurance, increasing specialisation, niche markets, use of ineffective therapies and cut-price services. The use of Key Performance Indices (KPI) has been a feature of business for some years but are they ethical in a veterinary setting? Does the use of KPIs lead to over diagnosis and over servicing? As Gittins notes (2018), “Doing things for money is a poor substitute for ‘intrinsic’ motivation: doing things well because it gives you a greater sense achievement” and “KPIs are often used as a substitute for management mental effort and are far too easily—and frequently fudged” (<http://www.rossgittins.com/2018/07/theres-smarter-way-to-encourage-better.html>).

### Business ethics is not professional ethics.

“*The customer is always right*”—a maxim originally coined in 1909 by Harry Gordon Selfridge, the founder of Selfridge’s department store in London. However, from a purely business point of view there are good reasons why it is wrong.

A **customer** is a person who buys goods or services from a shop or business. They generally lack loyalty, and their needs are met by goods and services priced to sell. On the other hand, veterinarians and other professionals have **clients** i.e., someone who receives professional services and to build

long-term professional relationships with.

The conflict between the demands of running a business and acting in the interests of your patient can be explained in terms of a conflict of obligations. As a moral agent, I have a duty of care for my dependents so running a profitable business is a way of fulfilling this duty. On the other hand, I have a duty to the interests of clients and patients, and this may mean sacrificing easy profits from unnecessary interventions. The public expects that professional services, for which they pay substantial fees, are delivered in a way that prioritises the needs of clients and patients rather than to the profit of the professional providing the service.

Codes of professional conduct are designed to ensure that where such conflicts occur, the interests of the patient or the safety of the public have priority over the needs of the business. Although the notions of ‘animal welfare’ and ‘appropriate’ may not be agreed on, ‘appropriate’ medical or surgical treatments should never mean ‘treatments that maximise my profits’.

Veterinary professional ethics demands that we practice ‘what should be’. Clearly that means using best evidence. All veterinary procedures should be based on best evidence, be justifiable and performed in the best interests of animals and their owners. Over-diagnosis and over-servicing should be avoided at all costs and the use of ineffective therapies shunned. This will ensure that the profession maintains its standing



and its social licence to operate, whilst also leading to better welfare all round.

That said, there is plenty of evidence that the costs of veterinary services are an issue leading to reduced vet visits and abuse of veterinarians and their staff. This is clearly an animal welfare and veterinary welfare concern.

A discussion by the profession regarding costs of veterinary services, over-diagnosis and over-servicing (perceived or otherwise) is well overdue. Being a professional necessitates self-reflection and this need is particularly relevant for veterinarians in practice making clinical decisions. Any organisation where the entrenched professional response to a problem is to reflect on it, seek to understand it and link it to knowledge, beliefs, practice and values often responds more effectively to challenges.

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## AAPAE Charter

The broad purpose of the AAPAE is to encourage awareness of, and foster discussion of issues in, professional and applied ethics. It provides a meeting point for practitioners from various fields and academics with specialist expertise and welcomes everyone who wants or needs to think and talk about applied or professional ethics.

The AAPAE fosters and publishes research in professional and applied ethics, as well as attempting to create connections with special interest groups.

However, the AAPAE does not endorse any particular viewpoint, but rather it aims to promote a climate in which different and differing views, concerns, and approaches can be expressed and discussed.



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