

Universidades Lusíada

Ray, Subhasis

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<http://hdl.handle.net/11067/6965>

<https://doi.org/10.34628/vdyw-w048>

Metadados

Data de Publicação	2024
Resumo	O projeto que tem desenvolvido, baseando-se em numerosos testemunhos e locais sobretudo nos EUA, que chama de “Dar Voz aos Valores” (DVV) pode ser resumido numa ideia simples: se você tem que defender seus valores, como fazer isso sem perder o emprego? O foco do DVV não é, portanto, Aristóteles. Não é uma teoria, não é um modelo, mas começa com uma suposição básica: E se eu quiser falar? Como devo falar? Como devo agir? Há sete pilares no projecto DVV: Valor, Escolha, Normalização, Propósito, ...
Palavras Chave	Ética profissional, Valores sociais, Corrupção
Tipo	article
Revisão de Pares	Não
Coleções	[ULL-FD] LD, s. 2, suplemento (2024)

Esta página foi gerada automaticamente em 2024-11-22T16:48:27Z com informação proveniente do Repositório

GIVING VOICE TO VALUES (GVV) PROJECT

Subhasis Ray ³³

Thank you for having me. I'm honoured to be at this beautiful campus of Lusiada University. It's my first visit to Portugal, but I always had a lot of interest in your country, not least because one of the early Portuguese explorers discovered my country, he believed so, but it happened by error. But my visit is not an error, it's an intent and I'm looking forward to a discussion.

I'm going to talk about something that we have been doing for the last 15 years. Something very practical. What I want to bring into the focus is the fact every corrupt activity starts with a decision. With the assumption that all of us in this room have faced this conflict in our lives, what decision will we take? So, this led us to a project of what we call as the "Giving Voice to Values" (GVV).

Essentially, one simple line, there is a full book on that and I'm going to show you the picture, but it just says: if you have to speak up for your values, how to do that without losing your job? The last part is important. We don't want to be a martyr; we don't want to be the villain or the hero. We want to keep our job, but we want to sort of speak up. I'm sure, I'm not going to do a full workshop here, I do that all around the world, but here I will talk about that. It's done with my colleague in University of Virginia, Darden School of Business, Professor Mary C. Gentile.

What I'm going to tell you is based on real life around 600 case studies of people from all around the world, right from frontline executives to students to CEOs, who told us how they voice their

³³ Mainooth University, School of Business, Ireland. Intervenção proferida pessoalmente, em língua inglesa. (<https://doi.org/10.34628/vdyw-w048>)

values. So, I pick up from what Professor Jay talked about before the lunch: how do we help people to speak up?

Going back a little beyond the project, before the project started, it actually started in the Columbia University campus and in Yale. When the incoming batch of MBA students were asked to give up an ethical dilemma and they were asked what would you do if you face this and the finding was very interesting. Around 30% said of course we do whatever it takes to keep our job; 30% of the people said if it's too much, I will quit. Of course, I'm simplifying the numbers here, but around 30% said, we will try to speak out. That gave us the trigger. Is it really true that people are successful in speaking out about their ethical values when facing a dilemma? So, we looked at researches starting from lousy Holocaust concentration camps, sports, cognitive neuroscience. What is it that helps people to speak out? And you have the book, the site and MOOC, and if you're not happy with all of them, I'm there to help you.

This is not a theoretical model. We have done this in more than 1000 plus organizations. The US Military, for example, and you can imagine the military would be having a lot of conflicts in a day-to-day life. Unilever, Black Soul, Lockheed Martin, the CFA Institute, the Finance and Accounting Institute. So, all sorts of people around the world are trying this out and I'm happy to talk a little bit about what this is.

So, the focus of GVV is not Aristotle. It's not a theory, it's not a model, but it starts with a basic assumption: What if you want to speak out? How should you speak? How should you act? And then, help you to practise that. Feel free to ask me as many questions as possible, but focus on action. So, there are seven pillars in a GVV world.

The first assumption is of course, that I want to speak out. If anybody thinks we'll keep silent and GVV is not for them. But we assume we all go to a workplace wanting to live a good life, wanting to speak out, but often we are silenced because of fear or other things.

So, Value is the first pillar of GVV.

So, when you say values, the first hand goes up in the class

is that values are so culture specific. If I'm muslim I have a certain type of value, if I'm Buddhist I have a certain type of value. So, we have addressed this question by looking at what we call as hyper norms. Irrespective of religion, culture, country, there are around 4-5 values that you find in every book, every context of the world. And we're saying let's appeal to those values when we face a conflict, because it's shared by everybody. Both by you if you're facing a conflict or by somebody who is inflicting that conflict on you. Respect for example. Everybody in the world understand respect as a value. So, if you face a crisis, the first figure is to look for those values, which are common whether you're in a corporate, whether you're in a college, whether you are in the United Nations. Respect is a common value. So that's the first thing to keep in mind.

The second pillar is Choice.

A lot of people said: I'm too small in the organisation to speak up. And then we talk to the CEOs. They said I'm too big to speak up because if I say something, maybe a hundred people will lose their jobs. But we realised the people who speak up believe they have a choice. They believe that they can speak up and that's an important part that you have a choice. So, in doing this, we often ask the class to think of two situations in their life, and I would like you to think about that and feel free to share if you want for a couple of minutes. One instance in your life when you spoke up. And there will be another instance in your life that you chose not to. So, the exercise is to think what enabled you to speak up in the first place, and what disabled you to speak up in the second place? Earlier, when I was working as an executive in a big multinational company, I had two bosses. I was reporting two people, they were not in good relationship. One of them once showed me a picture, a funny picture in a magazine and told me: why don't you go to the other boss and show him this picture and tell him that he looks like this funny guy? I didn't like that approach, but I couldn't say anything because I thought I was too small. But when I look back at the incident, I realize that if I would have spoken up, possibly I would have maintained my self-esteem much more. The reason I did not was because I was new to the organization and I was very scared.

So, I can guarantee in this room all of you had or have two such instances. One instance when you actually spoke up, another instance when you could not, and we do this over half an hour exercise, for you to think and share with the class what were the enablers, what were the disablers. I remember one more example from my experience of Teaching in Russia. I had lovely students there. I remember one story that speaks to me out of so many workshops I have given around the world on giving voice to values. So, she said that in Russia the ballet is very popular and a lot of girls spend a lot of time in learning ballet. She didn't want to do ballet, but her parents really wanted her to go to this very special club and take a lot of regulars training. And although I told the students you don't have to disclose, she said. I want to say it because I want to share this. One day, I decided I don't want to do ballet. This is not who I am. And we asked her what made her speak up against her parents. She said that she didn't want to be somebody else for the rest her life. She wanted to be herself. That conversation helped me. She also told us about another incident when she could not speak up. So, the idea here is all of us have given voice to our values at some point. Let's try to discover that moment to get strength.

The third pillar, or the third part of GVV is Normalization.

Generally, when we talk about ethical conflict, sometimes we get shocked, but the reality is that conflicts happen every day in every organisation. So, the picture on the top basically says there's no point in being angry and emotional about it. The more emotionally we are, the more mistakes we will make. So let us be like the Laughing Buddha. Try to think. When I walk into the office, there will be an ethical conflict. Today is normal. In the college, in the club, in a meeting. So, when you think it's normal, your reaction also becomes sort of spontaneous and normal. You don't get shocked, you don't become the hero or the villain of the meeting, but you just take it as a normal challenge and try to handle that. Expect values conflicts so that you can approach them calmly and confidently. If you over react, if you are emotional, is good in a drama, is good in a movie, good in a Netflix series, but in real life it doesn't work being over emotional.

The fourth pillar is Purpose, and this is what we found when we talked to people around the world.

They had a very clear idea what is their purpose in life and our experience is, if you have clarity on your purpose, you can sort of go back to that and shape your response. So, in this room, I don't know, maybe some of your purpose to be a lawyer to create a just society, some of you may have a purpose to become a manager, to create livelihoods, but the clearer you are about your purpose, easier it is for you to see that I can't become a lawyer or engineer or professor if I do this action. It helps you to anchor yourself, but it's also important to understand what's the purpose of the person who is trying to ask you to violate some code of conducts. Imagine a discussion between our senior lawyer and an intern, a senior officer and an intern. Ultimately, they have common purposes, but very often we sort of split it, but every organization, for example, would like to sustain themselves, would like to succeed, would not like to see complaints. So, two angles of this purpose. One is what is my purpose and can I hold onto that when I'm responding? But what is the other persons purpose? Is there some common ground based on which I can build my argument? In generall in the workshops we ask you to write it down, because when you write it down is very different then when it's in your head, but instead writing it down you realise, you want to be so and so person, possibly this action is not aligned to that.

The fifth pillar is called Self- knowledge, Self-image, Alignment.

If we have to give voice to our values, we need to have self-knowledge, self-image and alignment. How is it linked to the pictures from the top? How will self-image and self-knowledge help you to respond to a values crisis and ethical conflict? So, when I face a conflict situation, I start getting angry very fast, and that impacts my response. If I know that, and if I'm in a conflicting situation, I always try not to respond immediately. Just sort of elaborate, if I know I'm an introvert or I'm an extrovert, I can craft my response accordingly. If I know, for example, that I am a solo player, like a lot of us, we are not very comfortable in groups but very good in one-to-one interactions. But some of us in this room are very com-

fortable in groups. We do good teamwork and group assignments. Those who are good in groups would often like to find an ally when they face a conflict and use that ally to go to the boss or to another colleague or somebody else. But those who are solo players, who often ask for an appointment themselves, those who were very emotional, they often told us they never responded verbally. They prefer to type an e-mail sometime, show it to a friend or parents or whatever, and then send emails. This is a very important part. Your response is shaped by who you are. Do not try to change that, or possibly the results will not be very good. This is the interesting part of the GVV. We don't just do this for half an hour session and then take a flight and go back. Why GVV is a very different exercise from everything else you hear in ethics sessions. It believes in two things. How many of you here go to the gym? I don't. Those regular gym goers realizes that it is not about going tomorrow or not, it's about sustaining that. Going at a regular pace, because that's how you build your muscles. We bring that through these ethics discussion and talk about the "moral muscles". So, if we can practise continuously about situations where there will be ethical conflicts, we will be able to speak out. A big part of the GVV workshop is scripting and the second part is peer coaching. It's like in this class we divide you into small groups, think of a real-life conflict situation and discuss whom will you address, what would you say, based on the seven pillars and the rest of the class gives feedback to you. I don't teach. This is what we call as "Peer Coaching". The most powerful form of learning is peer-to-peer and that's how we develop this ability to speak.

A couple of important points are about reason and rationalization.

Whenever you're thinking about the conflict, it's about cheating in the exam, it's about not being the group work, it's about bribing somebody, you can expect certain reasons already given. If we know that, we can practise about. So, what could be some of those reasons? Truth versus loyalty. Sometimes you will be asked to choose right versus right, not right versus wrong. Right versus wrong is fairly easy to choose and respond to, sometimes is individ-

ual versus community. Sometimes is short term versus long term. We can argue for both justice versus mercy. Just this time you do this, then from tomorrow will be the most honest company in the world. I'll be the best boss you would ever have. When you expect this, you can practice your responses. When you practice this response becomes like going to the gym in real life. When this comes, you are more confident to respond.

Values, choice, normalisation, purpose, self-knowledge, voice reasons and rationalisation.

So, I want to end with poetry, starting with the famous Portuguese poet "I bear the wounds of all the battles I've avoid". Every ethical conflict that you don't respond, actually hurts you. The more you avoid it, the more wounded you will be. GTV actually allows you to go to what our Indian Nobel Laureate poet said: "where the mind is without fear and head is held high".

So, I think we need to make this transition. Obrigado.

(Resumo em português)

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Há sete pilares no projecto DVV: Valor, Escolha, Normalização, Propósito, Autoconhecimento-Autoimagem-Alinhamento, Razão e Racionalização. Em cada um reflecte-se sobre comportamentos em sintonia com estes valores éticos.