Ethics and Leadership

EDM DSBA T3 2020 / 2021

Session 2 reminder

The session 2 structure

- On Complexity in relation with the need for simplicity

- The two leadership « models » and their human roots

- On Ethics : three definitions, the third one consisting in relating the two first ones
  - Groups work and plenary discussion

The current complex worldwide context

- The current crisis is at once exceptional – due to its intensity and its extension – and trivial : the human world is constantly concernes by crises – e.g. changes which require decisions -, uncertainty, contradictions, emergent reality – e.g. complexity.

On Complexity : reminder of session 1

- *Complexus* : a fabric

- The fabric is a relevant metaphor for the human **collective** – e.g. political – life

- The collective human life is spontaneous, even if individualism is possible

- Tearing a fabric will destroy it – e.g. provoke irriversible effects : **irriversibility** is a second major caracteristic of complexity

On Complexity

- **The need for simplicity**
- Control
- Coherence
- Transparency
- Classic vertical leadership

- **On Complexity**
- Uncertainty
- Contradictions
- Emergent reality
- Empowering people

On Complexity and Simplicity

- Living on a daily basis in a « complex » world (ex. the digital natives) makes « complexity » familiar – as a consequence « evident » or « simple »

- To the contrary, a world which would not look « complex » would look an « odd » world, unknown and not understandable – ex. about the classic vertical hierarchy or leadership

- As a consequence, the « simple » world looks complex, whereas the « complex » one looks simple

- *Complexity and simplicity are relative to people perceptions / understanding – **communication** is crucial when it comes to it*

On Complexity

- Complexity cannot be understood *without taking into account the fundamental human need for simplicity*
- The real complexity is made of *the relations betweeen the need to recognize complexity and the need for simplicity*
- ***The real complexity stake concerns communication and lifelong learning education***.

The Leadership tension

- **Vertical Hierarchy**

- *Parent* – rules, law, protocoles, commandments

- *Child* : sentiment of being omnipotent *and* impotent at once

- **Equality (« Anarchy »)**

- *Adult* – becoming equal to each other, confronting uncertainty together

On Ethics

- **Etymology : Behavior**
- What people *do*
- Ways of life, skills, competences, etc

- **Spontaneous approach : Norms**
- What people *should* do
- Principles, copmmandments, guidelines, rules, etc

On Ethics

- The tension between norms and behaviour may result in a tension between :
  - What people may dream or consider as the unique and simple, universal normative guideline – « simplicity »
  - The reality of the people diversity – complexity »

On obedience and disobedience

- Obeying a rule for the sake of the rule may sound wrong – cf the example of the French resistance contrasted to the legal government during the Second World War; cf the discussion on the need to use weapons contrasted to the commandment « Thou shall not kill »

- Disobeying a rule may as well be wrong : ex. the social distance rules to prevent the pandemic

- *We humans are responsible, each moment – e.g; depending on circumstances – to evaluate what to do / what to decide, taking into account the rule we are supposed to obey, and what our spontaneous behaviour would be. We **are** this very responsibility.*

The Etymology of « Ethics »

- The *Etymology* of « Ethics »
    - « *ethos* » (Greek) and « *mores* » (Latin) : People Behaviour

- At Stake : « Bounded » Rationality and Relativism

The Spontaneous Approach of Ethics

- The Spontaneous Approach of Ethics
  - The *Normative* Approach
  - Based on the Implicit Assumption People Master their Actions
  - An Explicit, Conscious, Rational Voluntary Approach of Action and Decision Making
  - The (classic) Leader Approach
  - Future Oriented

The Spontaneous Approach of Ethics

- The Spontaneous Approach of Ethics

    - Assumption of Control
    - Always too Late
    - Paving the Way for Accusations

On Ethics

- Ethics consist in norms, rules, principles, commandments, etc, which make clear what is right contrasted to what is wrong

- But taking into account reality, ethics on the same time are concerned by the worldwide diversity of values, opinions, cultures, etc.

- There is a **tension** between ethics considered on the basis of norms and ethics considered on the basis of the real concret life

- The etymology of « ethics » is the same as the etymology of « morals » : it at first simply means « *behaviour* » in Latin (*mores*) as well as in Greek (*ethos*)

- The real approach of ethics consists in taking into account the two first definitions – as « norms » *and* as « behaviour » - ***together***.

- This makes a third definition emerge : ethics considered on the basis of the *relations between the two first definitions*. It will be in the course an approach of ethics on the basis of the notion of « **responsibility** ».

On Ethics

- We humans are responsible for the relations between our behaviour and the norms we are told concerning what is ethical or right vs. what ins unethical or wrong. We are responsible for these relations at once theoretically (through the way we *understand* them), and practically, through *decision-making*.

- We may even say that we humans, *are* this very responsibility.

- We always make decisions under circumstances, and circumstances are always complex, because the collective life, irriversibility, uncertainty, contradictions, emergent reality are indomitble caracteristics of reality.

- When it comes to ethics, the challenge is consequently ***to make the right decisions under uncertainty.***

On Ethics

- Making the right decisions under uncertainty represents all the more a challenge that :
  - The question emerges sooner or later of telling what is right and what is wrong depending on circumnstances – who knows and tells ?
  - While making any decision, we contribute to *shaping the future* – because any decision will have consequences on the real world.
- Added to our behaviour and our decisions, we humans *are responsibile for our preconceptions or prejudices*. Our preconceptions and prejudices will contribute to define our behaviour and our decisions.
- *How can we, on real time, favor that we behave « ethically » - e.g. being the more we can aware of our choices, decisions, etc ?*

Ethics as Responsibility

- Humans are responsible for the tension between norms and behaviour – even more, they *are* this very responsibility

- Ethics depend on circumstances – each time, people are to consider anew the tension betweeen what they « *should* » do and what they would spontaneously *do*

- *Cf Aristotle : « The natural right depends on circumstances ».*

- People do not need to *talk* of ethics *to be concerned by ethics* – ethics concern the whole life

The Politics and Freedom Tension

- « Athens » - defending the City against systematic questions
- Need for taken for granted roots
- Taken for granted values, behaviour, evidences. Daily life

- The Jewish community sticking to the rules, rituals, ceremonies, « the letter of the Law »

- « Socrates – research of the truth, questionning everything
- Doubting everything
- Steps back, thinking out of the box

- Jesus-Christ accomplishing the Law by adding the commandment of love

Some alluded to references

- Aristotle, *Nichomaquean Ethics*, see particularly Book V (cf about « The natural right depends on circumstances »)
- Berne E., see his works on group dynamics (« Transactional Analysis »)
- Knight F., *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, 1921
- Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*
- *The Torah (Genesis)*
- *The Gospels*