

Analysis & Conclusions mid-2014

Anyone who has read the documentary evidence and narrative on this website cannot avoid the conclusion that those in charge of dnwe in the years 2011 to 2013, at the very least, and arguably long before, and continuing now in 2014, failed morally across the board. We are not talking about two or three individuals, or two or three episodes, but of a consistent pattern of moral failure in an association that claims to represent business ethics and possess expertise in this field.

It has been important to expose the association for what it is, namely a coalition of hypocrites and intellectual fraudsters, and so to warn the public. However, the analysis cannot be left to rest there.

Some if not all of the individuals concerned would seem to imagine they have done nothing wrong. Although apparently indignant, they have however refused to this date (April 2014) to defend themselves against the well-documented charges of

1. attempting to manipulate votes, and subvert proper process; in this connection:
2. blatantly ignoring members' wishes as expressed as a resolution at at least one AGM
3. allowing an unrepresentative electoral system to persist despite contemporary alternatives
4. generally discouraging democratic debate prior to votes by, for example, imposing artificial time restrictions (this has been the case from the outset in 1993/94)
5. failing over the years to involve members in setting the agenda, for example, of conferences or failing to invite contributions to the association's journal (articles were

- by private invitation)
6. failing to provide for blind reviewing while upholding academic pretensions
 7. issuing false invitations to participate in policy formulation (e.g. not responding to and apparently not even reading the submissions)
 8. apparently seeking to prevent actual networking; in this connection
 9. failing to issue membership directories at reasonably regular intervals
 10. failing to allow any (let alone serious) debate about ethical principles or differences; in this connection:
 11. interpreting ethics as being self-evidently law-like and advocating “compliance” while suppressing discussion of character; in this connection:
 12. setting policy priorities where none are appropriate, and doing this without consultation with the membership
 13. engaging in censorship of criticism and arguably mobbing critical individuals
 14. deleting rather than archiving extensive debates
 15. at least one attempt at age discrimination
 16. one instance of serious slander (i.e. assertions that cannot be substantiated and where there was no attempt at substantiation)
 17. engaging in secret and unnecessary (indeed counter-productive) appointments
 18. failing to provide for transparency in the appointment of members of the oversight board / Kuratorium (cronyism); in this connection:
 19. these grandees would seem to do nothing even when members have appealed to them to intervene to correct malgovernance
 20. One charge that has not been laid, but could be: at least one instance of advocating a policy to the EU

authorities as if it were consensual policy when in fact no internal consultation took place

What is the mindset that leads to these people refusing to face up to any, let alone most, of these documented charges? (It is likely that they have not bothered to actually read this website, as opposed to just skimming it.)

One remarkable aspect, also ascertained in his experience by the man from Bremen, is that none of these people is much interested in ethics. Otherwise they would have engaged in the debate that Cusanus offered them. And so their conception of ethics is a mixture of rule-keeping and visceral (gut) reactions, the latter being colored by self-righteousness rather than disciplined by critical examination or knowledge of the wider world. They are ethically immature.

In the case of many episodes, only one or two board members or appointees were involved. It might therefore seem unjust to lay the blame for every transgression on each individual indicted on this website. Mostly, others probably did not know what their colleague was doing. However, the episode of the exclusion of Cusanus in May/June 2012 showed them acting in unison against his admonishments, and there they were even joined by many rank-and-file members who, on their own admission, had not read the evidence (and who refused to be identified). Does this circumstance not justify recourse to the charge of collective responsibility?

It may be implausible to think that there was any proper conspiracy, although in the end stage, according to the manager of dnwe, many leading players did consult extensively before deciding on exclusion (while failing, of

course, to engage in dialogue with Cusanus about their own conduct). It is more likely the case that they share a mindset such that it is natural for them to take parallel courses of action and therefore coordinate their conduct. Besides, they will have common commercial interests in propagating a particular view of “ethics”, a view that Cusanus has attacked.

The answer to the question about the mindset would, therefore, have to be sociological or psychological in nature, the mindset involving as it does a measure of self-deception. The psychological feature shared by many is, surely, that they are controlling personalities. The sociological feature is that of group-think. They have damaged the cause they claim to adhere to, but this damage has been inflicted by insensitivity and thoughtlessness, by choosing the most convenient avenue. They have exhibited banality, to use the word of Hannah Arendt. The verdict uttered by the companion of Cusanus when we were ejected from the June 2012 AGM was “faschistoid” – protofascist.

How serious is this tale? Does it matter?

Cusanus contends that it is much more serious than it might seem. True, a casual observer might note that there is often backbiting at charities or among academics and, compared with misappropriation of funds as occasionally occurs, such intrigues must count as minor misdemeanours only. Such an attitude will have led some to leave the association more or less discreetly, being resigned to the way of the world. But when the self-proclaimed ethicists are corrupt we have to do with a perversity which is particularly insidious. It is not comparable with unpleasantness at the chess club.

Cusanus contends moreover that business ethics, properly

understood and practised, is of immeasurable importance to the cohesiveness of society. There are, for instance, countless people who are subject in their work to massive abuse and exploitation because others, especially managers and so-called professionals, have scant regard for basic decencies, and this sorry state of affairs is deteriorating further even as the mantra of compliance is preached daily. Even when it is not behind the times the law largely fails to function in practice. This is quite apart from more macro-economic considerations that would make business ethics imperative.

Power

A – arguably the – key problem everywhere is that of power structures. How do these emerge, how are they maintained, and what damage do they do? contra-dnwe presents a case study, among other things, of illicit power at work. When people with some standing in society, in this case a number of professors, present themselves as the guardians of ethics, most people will be trusting, and complaisant. It can take quite some time to realise the deception.

There is, though, another aspect of power structures, which is also well illustrated in this case. It is the assumption that there must be fixed hierarchies, this assumption opening the way for authoritarian stances. It matters not that dnwe – as indeed its umbrella association, EBEN – bears the word “network” in its name. Authoritarian thinking must be so deeply ingrained in these people that they cannot properly imagine anything different. Plus, they are of course full of themselves. There is indeed one vice that governs all they do: Arrogance.

Generally, Cusanus maintains, arrogance is the most pervasive vice of the times, and not only in business and

politics. (This said, arrogance is occasionally justified, for instance in confronting the arrogance of others, or else their sloth or their greed.)

Another aspect of power structures is the psychological motivation involved: some characters derive psychological pleasure from exercising power over others. Subjecting oneself to a hierarchy is a small price indeed to pay for the satisfaction of instructing others on what they have to do and let.

Finally, confused understandings of ethics always provide ready ammunition for power play. As demonstrated by the posturing of the dnwe officers.

Part of the rationale for this case study (and for the considerable work undertaken in compiling it) has been to illustrate how (illicit) power structures work. Everything that has happened here occurs in comparable form in the world of work (and of course in politics). But normally there are legal or other constraints on what can be told.

Other topics

There are other organisational phenomena that the case study illustrates. One is misplaced faith in the notion of expertise. (For a while, board members even integrated the word “expert” into their email addresses!) Of course, in many walks of life there are people, sorely needed, who are experts. However, the sphere of morality is not one of them. Some people are morally more mature than others, others are more articulate about the matters concerned, some people have better judgement, or self-knowledge, or perceptiveness, but few who are genuinely knowledgeable about ethical ideas would abrogate to themselves the epithet expert. In the eyes of Cusanus, almost the most

objectionable transgression of the dnwe board has been to present their cronies as experts in ethics, people who demonstrably are ignorant of the intricacies or even the history involved, let alone people whose personal conduct is consistent with the epithet.

Indeed, a fertile topic for business ethics would be a critical look at how, in contemporary society, people claim expertise that they do not possess. In the line of work Cusanus knows best, translation, there are meanwhile no end of “companies” – obstructive agencies, meddlers, middlemen – claiming expertise that they do not possess. (They have a superficial knowledge sufficient to able to bluff their way, whereas those with a proper understanding of the craft are marginalised or exploited.)

The practice of asking people (members, customers, etc.) to give feedback, or to make suggestions, et cetera, and then failing to respond substantively is commonplace among companies. Here dnwe has chosen to imitate corporate practice.

This is how power everywhere works