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Ethical Challenges

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The Nature of Moral Passivity and Administrative Evil in Public Organizations: How can this Phenomenon be Solved to better Organizations?

The concept of administrative evil in public administrations has been explored for many years and debated amongst scholars in the United States. Administrative evil in simple terms are actions in organizations that have consequences for not only the organization but the people as part of the workplace. The definition of administrative evil refers to the evil of human beings; evil is defined as the unjustly and needlessly inflicting pain or death of other human beings. The problem of administrative evil in the public body is that it gives rise to other subcategories of the concept like the morality of passivity in administration (passive evil). Both concepts relate to the ethical challenges that plague the public sector; most ethical dilemmas can be defined as administrative evils in public organizations and the reluctance to speak up against these evils is an example of passive evil existing in public bodies. The moral of passivity perpetuates administrative evil in the public sector by letting it exist by doing nothing.

Scholars arguably help push administrative evil by leaving the concept of moral passivity out of their work. A lot of attention has been paid to administrative evil, but passive evil is often not talked about enough in scholar's work. This paper aims to explain how both concepts impact public institutions negatively, as well as examine examples of both taking place in institutions.

The paper will also offer solutions on how public managers should avoid and deal with administrative evil and passive evil in institutions.

As stated, administrative evil is the act of unethical behavior in organizations. If public administrations don't have a code of ethics for members that are part of the administration, there is a high chance that evil is running rampant in the workplace. Individual integrity is important to the aspect of evil in organizations as it relates to a person's personal commitment when experiencing evil. The paper will give a more in-depth outlook on personal integrity that can either help create the environment where this evil exists or be the reason evil does not exist in the institutions. How much does a person's passivity matter when examining evil in the workplace? Collective passivity relates to the collective integrity and consciousness of members in a group. However, we must be careful not to judge evil by conscious intentions because people hide their intentions. This is explored further in *Public-Service Ethics and Administrative Evil: Prospects and Problems* by Guy Adams and Danny Balfour "we cannot judge evil by conscious intentions, because psychological distortions tend to hide even from the perpetrators themselves their true intentions" (Adams, Balfour 119).

Adams also addressed how administrative evil can take place unwillingly. This is why public sector workers must be aware of the code of conduct in the workplace and specifically must be aware of what is ethical and unethical in the firm. Adams' quote on conscious intentions is a good reference point in exploring how administrative evil is evil whether it's intentional or unintentional. The article by Adams is the perfect groundwork to determine what administrative evil is and how it is present in public bodies in many different ways.

One of the main examples of administrative evil is the holocaust. Although the holocaust is an extreme example of administrative evil it is still administrative evil. The holocaust was

committed by officials who were supposed to protect all citizens on their lands instead; citizens were exposed to not only horrible living conditions but the mistreatment of citizens that resulted in the unnecessary pain and suffering and death to humans around the world. It took over 20 years for people in the public sector to talk about the holocaust as an administrative evil, but it is still one of the more prominent examples of evil in administration. The Holocaust also gave rise to the notion of compartmentalization which refers to the act of administrators separating one identity, values and responsibilities to justify unethical behavior. This is a common tool that was used on Nazi soldiers that their homeland is more important than their personal values in life. This is what resulted in Nazi soldiers committing crimes against humanity and some of the unethical decisions that came along with it. *The Ten Mask of Administrative Evil* by Mark Hoffman, et, al explores the point of compartmentalization in Nazi soldiers further as he states,) “...believes that the structure of the complex modern organizations diffuses individual responsibility and requires compartmentalized accomplishment of role expectations in order for work be performed on a daily basis. In Conspiracy, various middling Nazi officials appear to be primarily concerned about the ramifications...” (Hoffman et al 126). One of the most important points taken from the quote is the sense of instrumentalism toward the soldiers and scientists of the nazi regime by nazi leaders. Instrumentalism is the reason why compartmentalization works so well in administrative evil that you can’t have one without the other. Mark Hoffman further proves this point when he highlights the notion of instrumental rationality, which is the act of treating people as technical specialists only rewarded and valued for their specific expertise. “Human beings are represented as objects to be manipulated with respect to the laws and logic embedded in the economic calculus:” (Hoffman et al 126). Some scholars argue that the problems in administrations are not evil doers but those who allow evil to be committed.

Although the sentiment is true, both are problems in administration. What makes passive evil evil is that a person may not be actively involved in an evil but allowing evil to occur without speaking up which makes them just as much as the problem. This relates to the earlier example of the holocaust and how nobody spoke up for the injustices that were being committed on different soil around the world. To offer a little fairness to the people of the nazi regime the ones who did not agree were most likely threatened with their lives in some cases however, it is impossible to separate one from the evil when they are allowing it to happen or committed it it under the guise that they have no choice but to commit these evils. This is regarded as one of the characteristics of passive evil which is moral justification that the person has no choice but to commit these evils. Avoidance tactics are what perpetuates passive evil in administration. In fact, the literary article *The Problem of Passive Evil in Educational Administration: Moral Implications of Doing Nothing* by Eugene Samier describes avoidance tactics as tactics used to ignore evil in the hopes that it goes away. “Avoidance tactics can be used to distance oneself. One can rationalize that the perpetrator term will end soon, so it is best to ride out objectionable behavior, disregarding the harm that can be done in the meantime” (Samier 8). Samier agrees that passive evil relies on avoidance tactics that humans practice in administration all the time. In fact, people rely on them to ignore the evil taking place which is one of the fundamental natures of passive evil.

Personal integrity plays a big part in the decision that one makes when experiencing administrative evil. Integrity plays a big part in if someone is going to allow evil to exist in the public entities that they are a part of. This is all dependent on the type of people you have in your organization. What are their personal characteristics? What do they value? Are they ethical people? All these are important questions when analyzing what type of people are in your

administration. It is important for managers or people of power in institutions to learn what type of people are in their workplace because the firm reflects the type of people in public administration. Personal integrity is a hard concept to discuss in the moral implications of passive evil because there are no policies or mandates that can give someone integrity that's does not present in their personal characteristics as a human being. The ideal of personal integrity is that people can explore different realms of judgment and use their commitment to balance the decisions they make in their personal lives. Using this ideal as a framework for what type of people organizations should strive to hire people who are morally inclined to do the right thing even when pressured by unethical dilemmas to not do the right thing or let the wrong thing exist in the workplace Patrick Dobel explores personal integrity and agrees that personal integrity is a moral ideal that is based on moral responsibility. Dobel iterates, "Personal integrity as a moral ideal and a postulate of moral responsibility is not a hard nugget at the core, but dynamic. It can evolve or be unraveled" (Dobel 355). Dobel agrees that moral responsibility is related to integrity but also states that it can be involved or unraveled. Dobel's point about integrity being unraveled is an interesting point because it points out how integrity can fall apart just as much as it can evolve.

Dominant powers mean people that hold power in an institution usually shape the culture of the workplace. This fact is what makes Dobel's point about the deterioration of integrity important because it raises the question of how dominant norms in the workplace negatively impact the commitment of people to speak up? Are people willing to disregard their commitments to themselves and others just to fit in with these dominant powers? To answer the first question, dominant norms play a huge part in the integrity of the firm because they shape what will be allowed in the institution and what won't be tolerated. It is proven that workers in

the workplace will engage in unethical behavior if that is a norm in the organization. If managers in the workplace typically make racial jokes that push stereotypes or gender remarks in the workplace chances are high that the employees will engage in the same behavior, this means that it is possible that people will disregard their commitments to fit in with dominant norms. The common avoidance tactic in this case will be the presumption that these comments in the workplace are just jokes, but in fact they are not just jokes, they are harmful ideas that should not be tolerated in not only the public sector but all three sectors.

This leads to the next point of the paper which examines how regular employees can hold managers or people of power in firms accountable for unethical behaviors they encounter in the firm. Whistleblowing is one action that employees can use to hold those on a higher hierarchy accountable. Whistleblowing is when an employee of an institution reveals information about a private or public organization that is illegal, immoral, illicit or unsafe to the firm and its people. Whistle blowing is seen as a good method to counter unethical behaviors specifically scholars like Tahir Nisar's *Whistleblowing: When do employees act to 'blow the whistle'*? described whistleblowing as a good action in the public sector. Tahir points out "Whistleblowing is important; this has long been the case in every corporation. In order for an organization to remain robust, it must be free from fraud and unethical behavior" (Nisar, et al 47). Nisar argues that whistle blowing is a helpful tool in rooting out certain behaviors that plague the public and private sectors. It is important to note that a person's decision to become a whistleblower is based on their personal characteristics. The employee must have the moral implication to say something when actions that are not morally right are presented to them in their workplace.

Lars Lindblom in his article *Dissolving the Moral Dilemma of Whistleblowing* highlight the example that if someone discovered waste was getting dump in a lake by their house they

might say something to the public but, a lot of times this is seen as immortal because it is seen as not being loyal to the organization regardless of the potential pros that whistle blowing can have in the workplace. The potential pro of whistleblowing is of course the sense of accountability but also potentially creating a workplace with a positive foundation. To have a positive foundation, unethical dilemma cannot go unaddressed when creating an ethical environment for your employees. Whistleblowing can help fight against immoral aspects of public administration, it is important to note that public leaders have a duty to provide the best service possible for the community they serve. It is impossible to give the best administration when the organization operates in an evil setting, which is why it must be eliminated with the help of whistleblowing.

Lindblom's example of waste being dumped in the river was highlighted because it notes how whistleblowing is seen as immoral in workplaces because of the lack of loyalty. It is also seen as immoral because of the access of private information the whistleblower has access to because they were part of the organization. Lindblom explains the immoral perception of whistleblowing when he states, "The debate on morality whistleblowing centres on the conflict between the duty of loyalty to the firm or organization in which one works and the liberty to speak out against wrongdoing" (Lindblom 415). Earlier in the paper integrity was highlighted as a factor as to why employees either speak up when faced with administration evil or don't--these further highlights that erasing evil is only possible when people with integrity and a sense of morality speak up.

Lindblom's paper continues to lay the foundation as to what problems come to the surface with whistleblowing and one of them is fear that their job will find out and that they will lose their job. The fear of losing your job is normal, especially in this current economy where it is difficult to cover the cost of living. However, we must question if putting our personal needs

above what's right, right? Scholars should explore this aspect more in their papers when discussing the moral of passivity just so a better understanding can be had when discussing reasons why people choose not to speak up. This needs to be explored now because we need to be careful as public leaders to call someone immoral because they are inclined to protect their individual lives and families' lives by making the hard decision to not speak up. Does this fear give people an excuse to let evil continue in firms? The answer in most cases is no because of the dangers evil existing in public bodies can have for people not only in the organization but in the communities that they are meant to serve. People are seen as selfish if they value themselves over the greater population and some do not want to challenge the evil in the administration because of the possible repercussions of a person losing their livelihood; the inward turmoil that a person faces when coming to a decision is the reason for the continuation of avoidance tactics.

The only solution for countering administrative evil and eventually passive evil is to have a democratic valued code of ethics in the workplace. The reason for this is it will encourage people to speak up and eventually get people used to speaking up for things that go against the organization's ethical code. This directly counters the notion or the morality of passivity because people will most likely not be quiet when witnessing anything that goes against that value in the workplace. This will build commodities in the workplace and that will give rise to pride in the organizational culture which workers will want to protect against injustice. Adams and Balfour agree with the inherence of the democratic mindset in administration; in fact, it is explored further in their work, *Unmasking Administrative Evil* where they argue for the replacement of technical rationality mindset for core democratic values in the organization (Adams Balfour pg 72). Samier also explores moral regeneration as another solution but only possible if the people in the administration have the capacity to experience moral obligation and goodwill. "Moral

regeneration is possible, according to Michalson, through the capacity to experience moral obligation and goodwill (1990, p. 74)” (Samier 16). Public institutions must be willing to work for a shift of mindset of technical rationality and instrumentalism in order to adopt a code of ethics that centers around the collective.

In conclusion, the problem of administrative evil is a plague to administrations because it prevents them from accomplishing their mission, which is giving out the best service. Administrative evil only exists because of the continuation of passive evil in organizations, and the only way to get rid of both is a change from the technical rational mentality and instrumentalism that workplaces preserve. Democratic values in public administration can counter the evil that is encountered in the sector but only if the administration has people who are morally inclined to speak up. Exposing people to the organizational culture that values the ethics of democracy may give people the means to speak up when seeing evil because it goes against the integrity of the organization. The integrity of democratic culture may be one of the only ways to challenge dominant norms that perpetuates administrative evil and challenges the employees to say something when they see evil taking place. Public leaders must find people who share the same values as the organization and decide if the individual has a sense of morality. Although a lot of this solution is easier said than done, if leaders work toward this goal, it can possibly eliminate or at least limit evil in these public entities.

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